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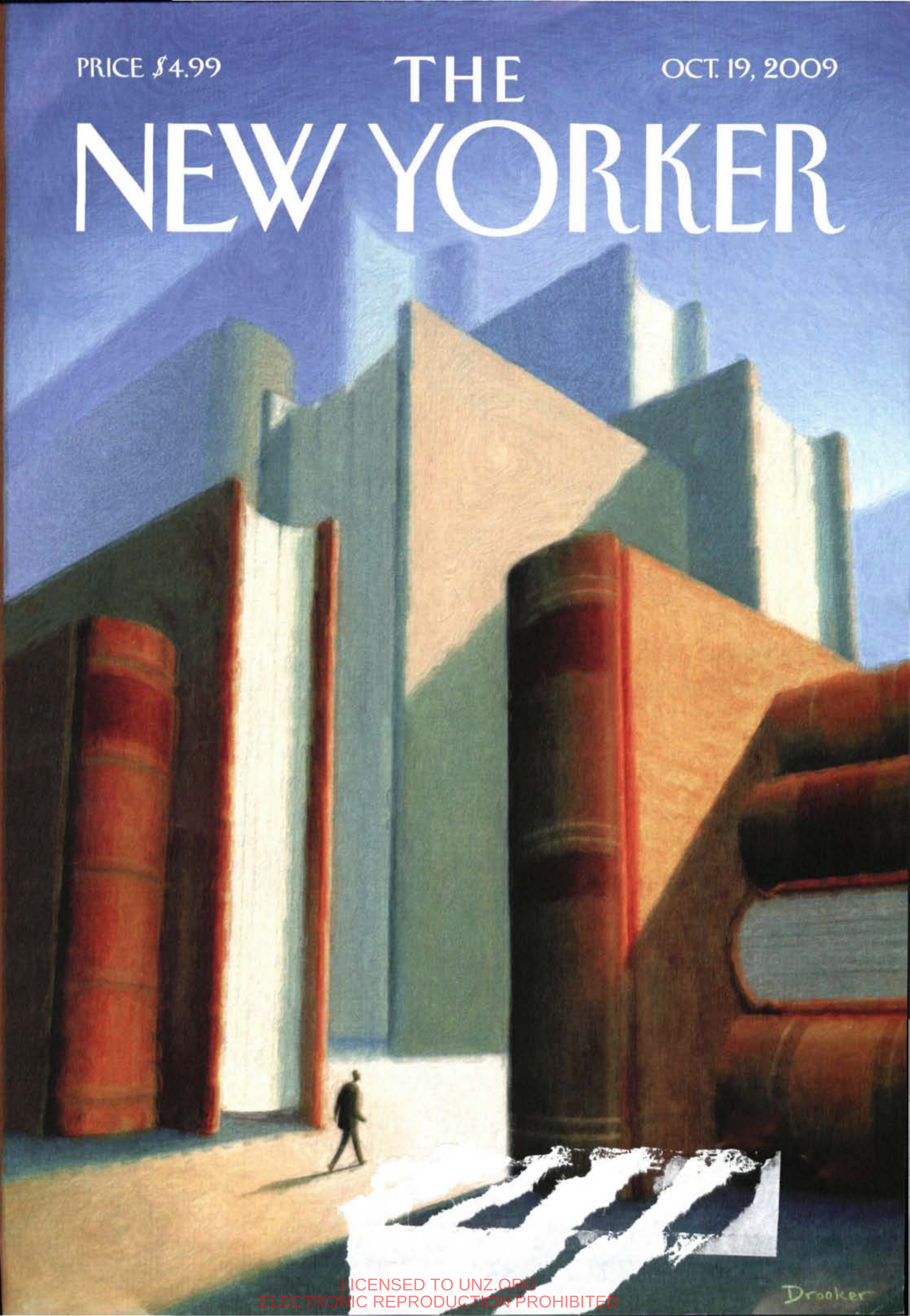
# THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 19, 2009



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# THE NEW YORKER

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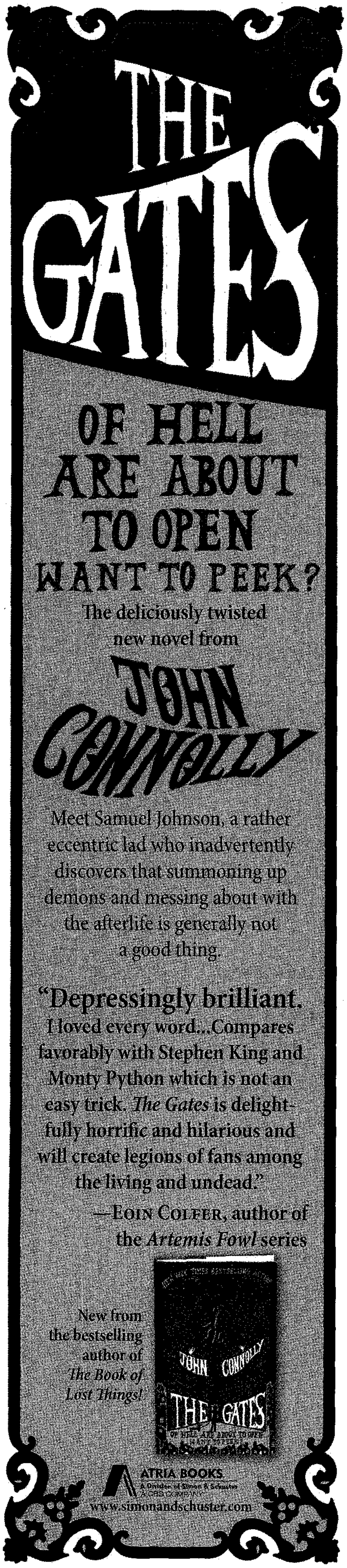

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# CONTRIBUTORS

Calvin Tomkins ("The Imperfectionist," p. 34) writes about art and cultural affairs for the magazine. "Lives of the Artists," a collection of *New Yorker* Profiles, is his most recent book.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 27), a senior editor and staff writer, is the author of "Politics: Observations & Arguments." He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

Ian Frazier (The Talk of the Town, p. 29) won the 2009 Thurber Prize for his book "Lamentations of the Father," which is available in paperback.

William Finnegan ("The Secret Keeper," p. 42) has been a staff writer since 1987. He is the author of several books, including "A Complicated War" and "Cold New World."

Bob Hicok (Poem, p. 66) will publish his sixth collection of poems, "Words for Empty and Words for Full," in January. He teaches English at Virginia Tech.

Eric Drooker (Cover) conceived and designed the animation for the feature film "Howl," which premières at Sundance in January. A special edition of his graphic novel "Blood Song: A Silent Ballad" is due out in December.

Malcolm Gladwell ("Offensive Play," p. 50) will publish his fourth book, "What the Dog Saw," later this month.

Rebecca Mead ("The Gossip Mill," p. 62) is a staff writer.

Julian Barnes (Fiction, p. 72) has published ten novels, including "Arthur & George." His memoir, "Nothing to Be Frightened Of," is out in paperback.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 78) writes about books and dance for the magazine. Her books include "Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism" and "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints," a collection of essays.

Daniel Zalewski (A Critic at Large, p. 82) is the magazine's features editor.

Will Eaves (Poem, p. 90), the arts editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, has published two novels, "The Oversight" and "Nothing to Be Afraid Of," and the poetry chapbook "Small Hours." His first poetry collection, "Sound Houses," is due out in 2011.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 92) is the magazine's senior drama critic. The play "Prick Up Your Ears," inspired by his biography of Joe Orton, is currently running in London's West End.

**THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM**

*Malcolm Gladwell* narrates an audio slide show about football and brain damage, and chats live with readers. / Audio: *Rebecca Mead* and *Daniel Zalewski* discuss children's books; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts the Political Scene; *Orhan Pamuk* reads a Nabokov story. / Slide show: *Irving Penn's* photographs for *The New Yorker.* / Video: A new Finger Painting by *Jorge Colombo; Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* on politics, *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Macy Halford* on books, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

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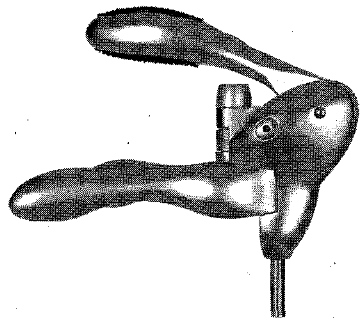
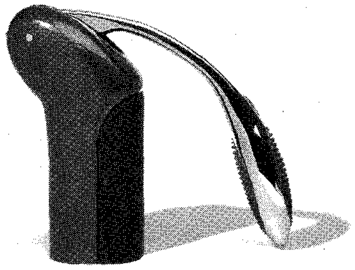


**Over easy?**



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# THE MAIL

## FLIGHTS OF FASHION

Judith Thurman wonders whether, in researching my book, "East to the Dawn," I ever raised the question of Amelia Earhart's possible bisexuality (A Critic at Large, September 14th). The question didn't occur to me. Although by the codes of this century she seems brazenly androgynous, in her own time she was quite à la mode. The nineteen-twenties flappers prized boyishness; women even bound their breasts to make them flat. Earhart's love of pants actually had a feminine angle: she hated her ankles. Her cousin Kathryn Challiss Pollack told me that she was quite right; she had piano legs, long but ugly.

*Susan Butler*
*Lake Wales, Fla.*

## WHAT WENT WRONG

The most revealing incident in James B. Stewart's article is Henry Paulson's rejection of Barney Frank's advice that any bailout should address executive compensation and foreclosures ("Eight Days," September 21st). Stewart writes that Paulson "knew that if the government tried to cap pay then no one on Wall Street would participate." This should have led Stewart to a conclusion nearly the opposite of the one he reached. It is not that Wall Street needed to be bailed out in order to save Main Street but that Main Street is hostage to Wall Street. The idea, which has become reality, that those who did so much to create the current economic situation must be immune to its effects tells us much about how the current economic system works. Those who are at the top of the economic ladder (and those, like Paulson, who come from their ranks) cannot be held to account for fear that they will sink the system. If that is the case, perhaps it is the system that is the problem.

*Todd May*
*Clemson, S.C.*

Stewart recounts how three men saved capitalism from itself, for itself. The most laughable quotes of this otherwise depressing tale are those that worry anxiously about our government bringing socialism to America. Karl Marx characterized the modern state as the "Executive Committee" of business and financial interests; this committee would be activated, in particular, during periods of economic meltdown. Outside the Marxist tradition, past generations of economists also understood that certain dynamics of capitalist economies would generate recurrent, debilitating crises that could be overcome only by state intervention. Stewart's article describes in great detail how an Executive Committee was constituted as an ad-hoc, unelected branch of American government, wielding extraordinary powers. The episode has everything to do with managing capitalism, and nothing to do with building socialism.

*Alec Stone Sweet*
*Leitner Professor of Law, Politics, and International Studies*
*Yale Law School*
*New Haven, Conn.*

## THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EYE

Anthony Lane describes Robert Frank's "The Americans" as the photographs of a realist whose aim is "painful and unblinking honesty" ("Road Show," September 14th). Lane points out elsewhere the strong choices Frank made in pruning twenty-seven thousand photos down to the final eighty-three, and in the process redacting "the act of a smile" in order to accentuate "the ruefulness on which Frank preferred to focus." Frank's work is doubtlessly honest, but, as Lane himself makes quite clear in describing Frank's editing process, it is far from unblinking. Frank had no method for completely smoothing the finite emotional edges produced by the camera's mechanics, and he is no less a realist for having tried to do so.

*David Hyman*
*New Orleans, La.*

•

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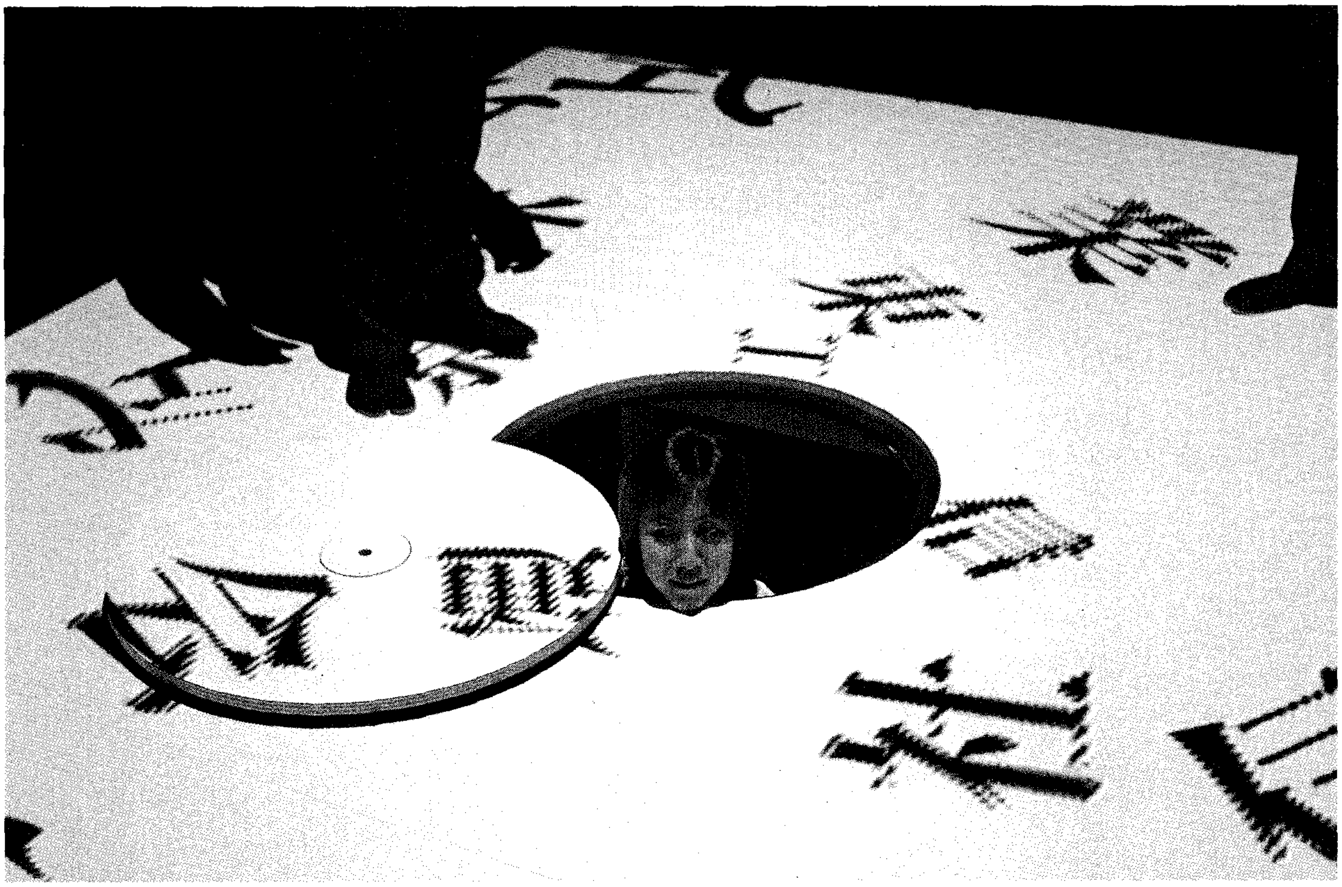

*"Heavenly Bento," at Japan Society. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.*

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

| S | M | T | W | T | F | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

## THIS WEEK

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### THE THEATRE
### RENAISSANCE MAN

"Fela!," the musical about the Nigerian Afro-beat pioneer Fela Anikulapo Kuti, which premièred Off Broadway last year, moves to the O'Neill. Sahr Ngaujah returns in the title role, alternating with Kevin Mambo; Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs. (See page 8.)

### NIGHT LIFE
### SIZE MATTERS

We may not be in the middle of a bona-fide swing revival, but there is a new wave of eye-opening big bands. Three of the most inventive—Darcy James Argue's Secret Society, Travis Sullivan's Bjorkestra, and Andrew Durkin's Industrial Jazz Group—come to the Bell House for the Brooklyn Big Band Bonanza. (See page 12.)

### ART
### LATIN QUARTERS

El Museo del Barrio turns forty this year—it was founded in 1969 by a group of Puerto Rican activists and educators, and has since expanded its programming to include all of Latin America and the Caribbean. The museum inaugurates its newly renovated Fifth Avenue building with the show "Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis," which traces the influence of such artists as Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera on the New York avant-garde. (See page 16.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC
### GRANDE DAME

Emma Kirkby's small but pure-toned soprano voice defined the sound of the early-music movement in the seventies and eighties. She makes a rare New York appearance at Weill Recital Hall. (See page 19.)

### MOVIES
### RED, GREEN, BLUE

This year's installment of restorations from the French studio Gaumont at MOMA features movies made with an early color process called Chronochrome or Trichromie, in which three images were simultaneously shot through colored filters. The resulting films were famed for their rich, nuanced hues. The program will be introduced by Gaumont's current chairman, Nicolas Seydoux. (See page 24.)

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## THE THEATRE
## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.*

**AFTER MISS JULIE**
Sienna Miller stars in Patrick Marber's adaptation of Strindberg's play from 1888, about an upper-class girl who preys on a servant at her father's country estate. Marin Ireland and Jonny Lee Miller also star; Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

**ANT FEST 2009**
Ars Nova hosts a festival of up-and-coming artists presenting their work, from horror theatre and spoken word to magic and vaudeville. Opens Oct. 19. (511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)

**AVENUE Q**
After a six-year run on Broadway, the arch puppet comedy relocates to New World Stages. In previews. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

**BYE BYE BIRDIE**
John Stamos, Gina Gershon, Nolan Gerard Funk, Jayne Houdyshell, and Bill Irwin star in the 1960 musical, directed and choreographed by Robert Longbottom, about a fifties-era teen idol. With a book by Michael Stewart, lyrics by Lee Adams, and music by Charles Strouse. The Roundabout production opens the new Henry Miller's Theatre. In previews. Opens Oct. 15. (124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE EMPEROR JONES**
The Irish Rep begins its twenty-second season with Eugene O'Neill's play from 1920, about a black man who escapes from prison and reinvents himself as the ruler of a Caribbean island. Directed by Ciaran O'Reilly. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

**FELA!**
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographed this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the politically active musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones; music performed onstage by members of Antibalas. Previews begin Oct. 19. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

**FINIAN'S RAINBOW**
The "Encores!" production of the 1947 musical, involving an Irishman and his daughter, who travel to America to bury a pot of gold, has been expanded for Broadway. Jim Norton, Kate Baldwin, Cheyenne Jackson, and Christopher Fitzgerald star; with music by Burton Lane, a book by Yip Harburg and Fred Saidy, and lyrics by Harburg. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**GHOST LIGHT**
Desi Moreno-Penson wrote this play, directed by Jose Zayas and produced by Immediate Theatre Company, about a couple of artists who find out that the hotel room where they're meeting for a secret affair is haunted. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

**GOOD BOBBY**
Brian Lee Franklin wrote this biographical drama, about the political career of Robert F. Kennedy. Presented by Greenway Arts Alliance; Pierson Blaetz directs. Opens Oct. 14. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

**HANSEL AND GRETEL**
Catherine Wheels Theatre Company, in association with Brunton Theatre, presents the children's fable at the New Victory. Opens Oct. 15. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

**INVENTING AVI**
Robert Cary and Benjamin Feldman wrote this comedy, in which a producer and her sister, an actress, collaborate on a play by an Israeli writer. Mark Waldrop directs, at the Abingdon. Opens Oct. 14. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-2055.)

**THE LADY WITH ALL THE ANSWERS**
Judith Ivey stars as Ann Landers in David Rambo's play, based on the life and letters of the advice columnist. B. J. Jones directs. Opens Oct. 14. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

**MEMPHIS**
Joe DiPietro wrote the book and lyrics and David Bryan wrote the music and lyrics for this new musical, about the birth of rock and roll. Christopher Ashley directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 19. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE NEIL SIMON PLAYS: BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS**
David Cromer directs Simon's 1983 play, starring Laurie Metcalf and Dennis Boutsikaris. In previews. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

**NIGHTINGALE**
Manhattan Theatre Club presents this play written and performed by Lynn Redgrave, about her grandmother Beatrice. Joseph Hardy directs. Previews begin Oct. 15. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**THE OLDSMOBILES**
Roger Rosenblatt wrote this one-act play, about a middle-aged couple in an existential crisis. In previews. Opens Oct. 17. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

**ORDINARY DAYS**
Roundabout Underground presents a new musical by Adam Gwon, directed by Marc Bruni, about the intertwining lives of four New Yorkers. In previews. (111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

**SUCH THINGS ONLY HAPPEN IN BOOKS**
Keen Company premières a suite of short plays by Thornton Wilder, directed by Carl Forsman and Jonathan Silverstein, with live musical accompaniment. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**THE UNDERSTUDY**
Scott Ellis directs the New York première of Theresa Rebeck's new backstage comedy, starring Julie White, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, and Justin Kirk. Presented by Roundabout Theatre Company. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

## TABLES FOR TWO
## CIVETTA

HONORE BROWN

98 Kenmare St. (212-274-9898)—Ron Suhanosky, the chef at this new Italian spot in Nolita, also helms two other restaurants, both named Sfoglia (after the term for an uncut sheet of pasta)—the original, on Nantucket, and a popular offshoot, on the Upper East Side—and there's a sense that Civetta (which means little owl, or, colloquially, a flirt) is an uncomfortable transplant. There are some hints of the neighborhood: the rumble of the subway, the chandeliers that look like cages. But the service is sincere, even earnest (no indifference or insouciance here), and the older, well-heeled crowd doesn't flinch at a thirty-dollar entrée. Even so, the locals aren't shunning the place. One recent evening, after a longtime area resident ran into a group of old acquaintances, the waitress remarked, "This is the place for chance encounters. The other night I had three old friends I hadn't seen in years walk through the door—and they weren't even together."

Civetta has had something of a rough start, and the uneven food caused some speculation that Suhanosky wasn't spending enough time in the new kitchen. But not long ago, with a fresh menu, it was hard to find a disappointing dish. Little meatballs of lamb and goat cheese were succulent, though the cheese manifested itself mostly through a faint gaminess. Monkfish *polpette*, the size of golf balls, sat in a rich tomato sauce atop richer polenta. "You could serve that to people and they wouldn't even know it was fish," remarked one diner, by way of a compliment. The *filetto di manzo* came with a crunchy artichoke salad that added a welcome astringency to the beef. Any lingering fear of ordinariness was banished by the gnocchi, perfect light buttons of potato, laced with mushrooms and polished with a delicious *fonduta*. Dessert seemed almost anticlimactic, and aspersions were cast, in particular against the cannoli. "Those are never any good," a dissenter claimed. The cannoli arrived: crisp cylinders, stuffed with chocolate and vanilla creams. One bite: "I take it all back." (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner; weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $18-$30.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

## NOW PLAYING

**BROKE-OLOGY**
In Nathan Louis Jackson's new play, a young man leaves college in Connecticut to return to his Kansas home, where his brother still lives, to care for his sick father. Thomas Kail directs the Lincoln Center Theatre production. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

**HAMLET**
Jude Law stars in the Donmar Warehouse production; Michael Grandage directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

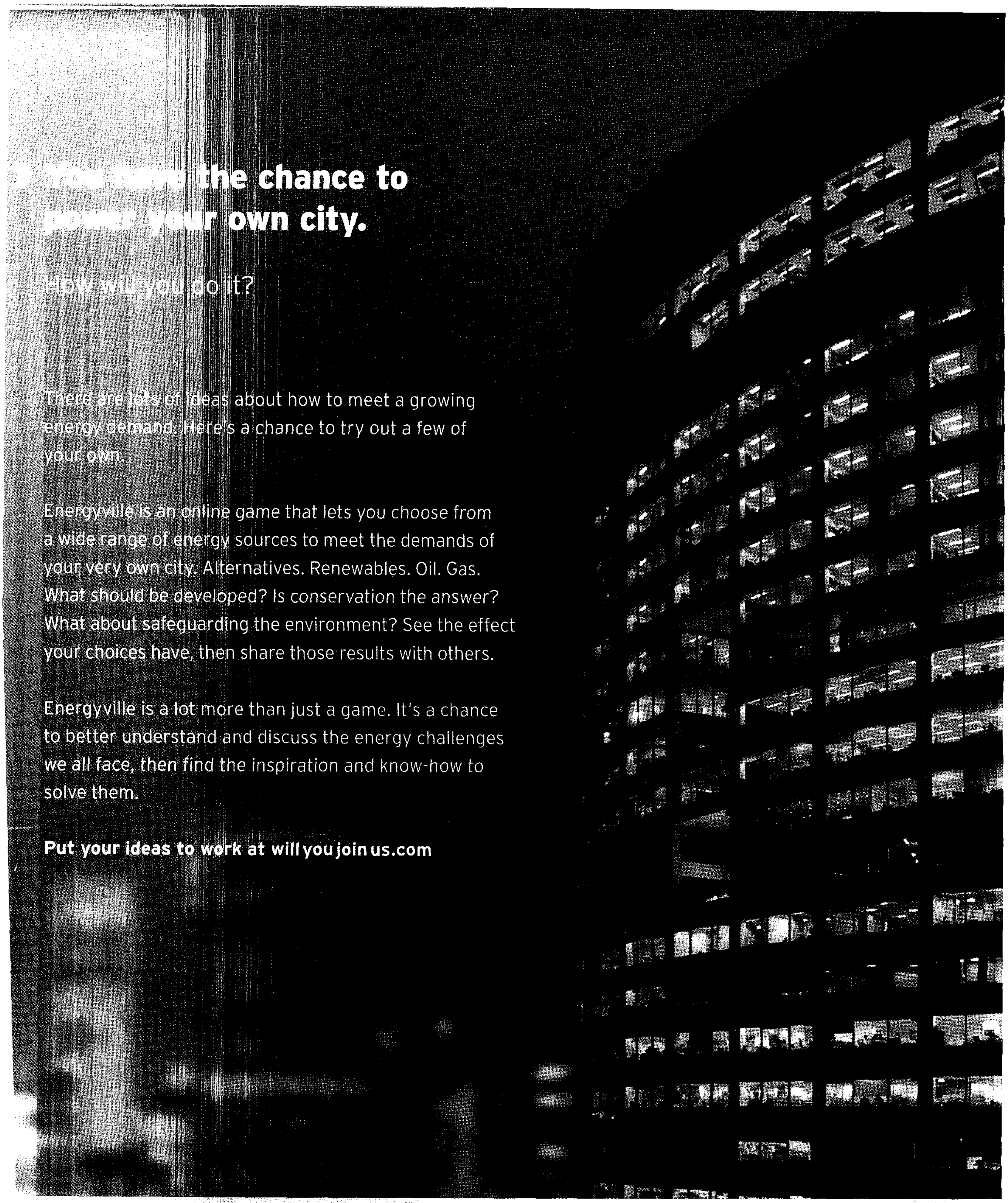
**LET ME DOWN EASY**
Leonard Foglia directs Anna Deavere Smith's latest one-woman show. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

**MY LIFE IN A NUTSHELL**
The puppeteer Hanne Tierney presents a show, featuring life-size puppets, that studies triangular relationships. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

**OLEANNA**
Bill Pullman and Julia Stiles star in David Mamet's drama, about the power struggle between a male professor and a female student. Doug Hughes directs. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE ROYAL FAMILY**
This 1927 chestnut about the histrionic Barrymore clan, written by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman, has a good set, an expert cast (with bravura performances by Jan Maxwell and Reg Rogers), and a firm directorial hand (Doug Hughes). What it lacks is any reason for revival: except for the elegance of its construction—it's a fun machine that delivers very little real fun—the play has nothing to tell us about actors or psychology or even the society these personas once ravished. The experience is like a Mercedes racing its engine in neutral: a lot of noise but no traction. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

**A STEADY RAIN**
In Keith Huff's play, set in Chicago, the complexities are so much on the surface that this ninety-minute intermissionless show—it goes down very smoothly—is not especially memorable as a drama. All that will stay with you when you leave the theatre is the fact that you have just watched two movie stars—Australia's Hugh Jackman and Britain's Daniel Craig—try on Midwestern accents like some kind of drag. Jackman gives it all he's



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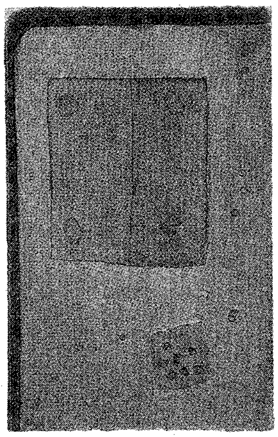
## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## BLITHE SPIRIT

"The point in all cases is that the deities must be made to laugh," Ree Morton wrote in a journal in 1975, eight years into an avant-gardist career that had begun at age thirty, when she was a Navy housewife and the mother of three. She died in a car crash two years later. A rousing show at the Drawing Center rescues Morton from obscurity in the shadows of unsmiling higher powers: post-minimalism, which she embraced and advanced with heretical insouciance, and feminism, which freed her without politicizing her temperament. Her buoyantly inventive works range from tiny, humble scrap-lumber reliefs, marked with felt-tip pens, to the exuberant "Devil Chaser," a sprawl of colorfully festooned wire, its title spelled out in wooden block letters on the floor. Morton tackled recondite aesthetic ideas without fear or affectation. She dared to be decorative and, about her kids, breezily sentimental. Many heavyweight reputations of Morton's contemporaries have sunk. Hers now bobs to the surface—there may it stay.

*—Peter Schjeldahl*



ORTON, "UNTITLED" (1973)

got—he's a physical actor, who finds his character in movement—but Craig understands how to work with stillness. Although by appearing live these two are taking a chance, the play falls well within their comfort zone: it's as neatly plotted as any Hollywood movie written by committee (and is now slated to become one). (Reviewed in our issue of 10/12/09.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**STILL LIFE**

It used to be that Topic A was sex; these days, it's death. In Alexander Dinelaris's smart, well-written, impressionistic script, fear and loss duke it out in the compelling love story between a blocked photographer who captures the past and a trend-spotting adman who finds himself with a limited future. The cast, headed by the superb Sarah Paulson and Frederick Weller, is uniformly expert; the play is well directed by Will Frears. As a writer, Dinelaris is almost too cool for school. He has no problem with presentation; the challenge is penetration. For that, his pithy dialogue would have to be couched in a format that amounted to more than movie scenes and movie problems, performed by movie actors. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

**SUPERIOR DONUTS**

In Tracy Letts's new play, Arthur Przybyszewski (Michael McKean, in a beautifully nuanced performance) owns a small bakery that his father, a Polish immigrant, started in a working-class neighborhood of Chicago. A Russian porno-shop owner, Max Tarasov (the phenomenal Yasen Peyankov), wants to buy Arthur's shop, tear it down, and expand his business. Letts disrupts what could have been a fine one-act character study by introducing a black street kid, Franco Wicks (the technically accomplished and charismatic Jon Michael Hill), to shake things up. Franco is trying to wrest approval not just from his employer but, one suspects, from the whole white world. Letts's considerable compassion finds an outlet here in a time-worn cliché—middle-aged white dude learns about love and fatherhood from the unknowable young black male—and ends up seeming banal. (10/12/09) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**TWO UNRELATED PLAYS BY DAVID MAMET**

The longer piece of the evening (the curtain-raiser is a short two-character play called "School"), "Keep Your Pantheon" centers on the ancient-Roman acting teacher Strabo (Brian Murray). What really gets him excited is not keeping his acting school together—which he cannot do—but trying to remove the toga of his student Philius (Michael Cassidy). He does so despite Pelargon (John Pankow), his right-hand man and former lover, who keeps a jaundiced and affectionate eye on his employer's comings and goings, which occur—hilariously—with such inexorable inventiveness that one can only admire and feel grateful for "Keep Your Pantheon." The director, Neil Pepe, who seems to love the strip-joint atmosphere of the comedy as much as we do, has done an exceptional job of matching performer to part. But Murray is the one you can't take your eyes off. He has a Richard Burton voice—growly and insinuating—overlaid by a whine that suits this snivelling, horny coward. (10/12/09) (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

**WISHFUL DRINKING**

Carrie Fisher is best known as the princess of Alderaan, but she makes a convincing bid as camp goddess in her biting stage tell-all. "Happy days are here again," she sings drolly, dousing audience members with glitter, then settles into a punchy revue of her dysfunctions: alcoholism, bipolar disorder, being the product of what she calls "Hollywood inbreeding." "Good anecdote, bad reality" is how she describes her marriage to Paul Simon, and it's clear that self-mockery is her best palliative (besides pills, of course). The show wears thin—it tops two hours—only because Fisher's wit exceeds her purview, which is herself. Nevertheless, her ability to boil down a life of mishaps into tart one-liners is a testament to some crazy kind of strength. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

### *Also Playing*

**AFTERMATH:** New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Through Oct. 18. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A BOY AND HIS SOUL:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. **CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-868-4444. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. Through Oct. 18. **KILLERS AND OTHER FAMILY:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. Through Oct. 17. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MAHIDA'S EXTRA KEY TO HEAVEN:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 18. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **VIGIL:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200.

## NIGHT LIFE
## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.*

**B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL**

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 16-17: The great soul singer **Al Green.**

**THE BELL HOUSE**

149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Oct. 15: **Langhorne Slim** plays guitar like it could stop a train. With a voice that is nasal, high, and powerful, and has a little bit of a twang, the frenzied flat-picking Slim has become an indie-folk star. He has a new record, "Be Set Free." Joining Slim on his nationwide tour is the country-rock band **Dawes.** Formerly known as Simon Dawes, the Malibu-based four-piece has a classic American sound, reminiscent of Neil Young, that is as romantic as Los Angeles's Laurel Canyon, where the group recorded its latest album, "North Hills."

**"BONK!"**

This new festival featuring forward-thinking contemporary brass bands from around the globe was inspired by "Honk!," a similar gathering in Boston (the fourth annual edition of which just wrapped up this past weekend). Put together by members of the **Hungry March Band** and the **Rude Mechanical Orchestra,** "Bonk!" features those bands along with other local acts, **Raya Brass Band, Stumblebum Brass Band,** the **Circus Amok Band,** and **Veveritse.** Seattle's **Yellow Hat Band,** Chicago's **Environmental Encroachment,** and Rome's **Pink Puffers** will also be on hand. Events include a show at Santos Party House, on Oct. 15; a pub crawl through the streets of North Brooklyn, on Oct. 16; and a potluck picnic in Williamsburg, on Oct. 18. (For a full schedule, visit www.bonknyc.info.)

**BOWERY BALLROOM**

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 14: The **Dodos,** from San Francisco, are on a U.S. and European tour celebrating the release of their latest album, "Time to Die." The group is a bassless trio with a unique indie-folk sound.

**CITY WINERY**

155 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Oct. 15: The gimlet-eyed folksinger **Dar Williams.**

**HIGHLINE BALLROOM**

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Oct. 14: In 1981, the lo-fi outsider music legend **Daniel Johnston** used a tape recorder and a piano in the basement of his parents' house to create his first compilation, "Songs of Pain." With the pop perfection of Beatles tunes and a manic intensity (the 2005 documentary "The Devil and Daniel Johnston"

made his bipolar disorder public), Johnston's music has influenced countless musicians. Nearly thirty years and twenty-five albums after his recording début, the prolific songwriter and imaginative cartoonist, who is forty-eight, has a new record, "Is and Always Was," that was produced by Jason Falkner (who also worked with Beck and Paul McCartney). It has higher production values than his earlier work, but the sweet clumsiness that has long endeared his music to his listeners remains. Oct. 19: England's **Brand New Heavies** were prime purveyors of smooth acid-jazz grooves in the nineties, merging elements of funk, hip-hop, and R. & B. into a danceable mélange that fit the era's cross-pollination aesthetic to a tee.

**ISSUE PROJECT ROOM**
232 3rd St., Gowanus, Brooklyn (718-330-0313)—Oct. 16: Matt Valentine and Erika Elder continue to explore the nuances of classic rock and folk music with their amorphous project **MV & EE.** They are here tonight to mark the release of their latest record, "Barn Nova."

**KNITTING FACTORY**
361 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-529-6696)—Oct. 17: Finding swift fame with her tenure in the nineties alternative-rock band Hole and, briefly, Smashing Pumpkins, the flame-haired bass player **Melissa Auf der Maur** struck out on her own in the middle of this decade. Recently, she has branched out with a multimedia project, "Out of Our Minds," which is a film, a comic, and an album.

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-570-3949)—Oct. 17: The Prada-loving punk chanteuse **Patti Smith** marks her sixth appearance at the Met with an homage to the Swiss photographer Robert Frank, who is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his haunting collection "The Americans" with an exhibition at the museum. In the Beat-affiliated Frank, Smith found one of her many heroes, and she described her patriotic feelings about the series in a 1971 journal entry. "When I look in myself I see Abyssinia, nineteenth-century France, but I can't recognize what makes me American," she wrote. "I think about Robert Frank's photographs—broke down jukeboxes in Gallup, New Mexico, swaying hips and spurs, ponytails and syphilitic cowpokes, hash slingers, the glowing black tarp of US 285 and the Hoboken stars and stripes." For this performance, she'll be accompanied by her daughter, **Jesse**, on piano, among others.

**NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE**
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Oct. 15: Twelve years after their irresistibly catchy "MMMBop" made them household names and the subjects of feverish teen-age obsession, the three **Hanson** brothers are still making seamless pop. Oct. 16: Responsible for such classics as "A Horse with No Name," "Ventura Highway," and "Sister Golden Hair," **America** remains a soft-rock titan.

**(LE) POISSON ROUGE**
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Oct. 19: Few songwriters or composers can boast a career as rich and diverse as **Franco Battiato's.** The Sicilian native, now sixty-four, began working in the late sixties. In 1971, he recorded a seminal Italian prog-rock album, "Fetus" (which was rereleased in 2006 with liner notes by Jim O'Rourke). He has written pioneering classical compositions (one of which won the 1978 Stockhausen Prize) and three operas. His résumé includes a writing credit for the 1984 Italian Eurovision submission, "The Trains of Tozeur," which featured unusual meter changes, a quote from Mozart's "Magic Flute," and lyrics alluding to the French colonial legacy in Tunisia. In more recent years, Battiato has collaborated with a former member of Simple Minds, with the Sicilian philosopher Manlio Sgalambro, and with the late Argentinean singer Mercedes Sosa. These days, he's reworking cover songs like the Stones' "Ruby Tuesday" in a dreamy orchestral style, and for this performance, his first in New York in a decade, he'll be presenting several of them, alongside works drawn from throughout his career.

**"PURGATORIO"**
The impresarios behind the Box, the notorious little downtown club, move uptown for a few

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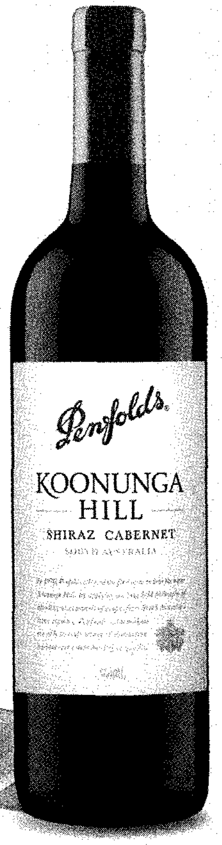

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weeks with their new venture, in the former China Club space, which should have room aplenty for their wild imaginations. Spread out over three floors and fifteen thousand square feet, the theatrical interactive Halloween installation can be expected to have at least a touch of the outrageously edgy vibe that has made the Box so popular. (268 W. 47th St. Oct. 15-31. For more information, visit www.enterpurgatorio.com, or call 212-352-3101.)

**RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL**
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Oct. 14: The local Russian-born singer-songwriter and piano player **Regina Spektor** has a style that ranges from folk to pop to punk.

*The "Bonk!" festival brings brass bands from the U.S. and overseas to New York City for performances in clubs and elsewhere.*

JIM STOTEN

**SANTOS PARTY HOUSE**
96 Lafayette St. (212-584-5492)—Oct. 16: For nearly three decades, the Osaka all-girl group **Shonen Knife** has produced delightfully carefree and crunchy E.S.L. bubblegum punk. Their songs focus on things like barnacles, biscuits, Barbies, and barbecues, and their wide-eyed enthusiasm is disarmingly authentic. Oct. 19: Ernest Greene, the twenty-six-year-old behind **Washed Out**, has expressed an aversion to taking his one-man synth-pop act on the road, so a chance to see him craft his temperate eighties-tinged pop in a live setting may prove to be a rare pleasure. He is here to support his most recent release, "Life of Leisure," which came out last month on Mexican Summer records and was recorded, like the rest of his work, in his parents' house in rural Georgia.

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**THE BELL HOUSE**
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Oct. 19: The **Brooklyn Big Band Bonanza** features three groups intent on reinventing the form. **Darcy James Argue's Secret Society** couches the melodicism of its leader's tunes in dramatic sonic textures. **Travis Sullivan's Bjorkestra** reconfigures the work of the avant-pop songstress Björk. The **Industrial Jazz Group,** featuring the compositions of Andrew Durkin, brings a touch of West Coast eccentricity to the mix.

**BLUE NOTE**
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 13-14: The **Stanley Clarke** trio. Two old fusion mates from Return to Forever—the bassist Clarke and the drummer **Lenny White**—are joined by the virtuosic keyboardist **Hiromi.** Oct. 19: To judge by **Marcus Strickland's** new album, "Idiosyncrasies," the tenor saxophonist might be best heard in the spare company of bass and drums, as he is here.

**CAFÉ CARLYLE**
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Oct. 13-Nov. 7: The cabaret-jazz vocalist **Jessica Molaskey** and her guitarist husband, **John Pizzarelli,** deliver classic and contemporary tunes with aplomb. They have a graceful charm and heaps of musical expertise.

**DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA**
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 14-18: A passionate alto saxophonist whose heart remains wedded to bebop, **Charles McPherson** celebrates his seventieth birthday in the company of a first-rate mainstream unit including the trumpeter **Tom Harrell,** the pianist **Jeb Patton,** and the bassist **Ray Drummond.**

**JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER**
Oct. 15-17: "The Ladies of Duke Ellington." The **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** and **Wynton Marsalis** salute the master of jazz song, for whom both the romantic and the carnal aspects of love were lifelong inspirations for his sensuous and durable compositions. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

**JAZZ STANDARD**
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 15: The pianist **Helen Sung** sets the words of the poets Gwendolyn Brooks, Emily Dickinson, and Dana Gioia to music. She'll be joined by the singer **Carolyn Leonhart.** Oct. 16-18: The **Ben Allison** band. On his new album, "Think Free," the bassist Allison works with an unusual string-and-brass front line, consisting of the violinist **Jenny Scheinman,** the guitarist **Steve Cardenas,** and the trumpeter **Shane Endsley.** They're joining him here along with **Rudy Royston,** who also handles the drums on the release.

**SMALLS**
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 14: The dexterous guitarist **Gene Bertoncini** delivers a solo performance. Oct. 15: **Dan Barrett,** a neo-swing trombonist, performs duets with the pianist **Ehud Asherie. Tad Shull,** an underrated tenor saxophonist, follows, with a quartet.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD**
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 13-18: The **Bill Charlap** trio. The pianist Charlap is deftly stepping into the shoes of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan. He's joined here by his regular bassist, **Peter Washington,** but for this occasion the drummer is the magisterial **Lewis Nash.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

## ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'"** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Nov. 15. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Pablo Bronstein."** Through Feb. 21. ♦ **"Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping (1733-1799)."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"Ron Arad: No Discipline."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Paul Sietsema."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Gabriele Münter and Vasily Kandinsky, 1902-14: A Life in Photographs."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Intervals: Kitty Kraus."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Paired, Gold: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Steve Wolfe on Paper."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"From the Village to Vogue: The Modernist Jewelry of Art Smith."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Magic in Ancient Egypt: Image, Word, and Reality."** Through Oct. 18. ♦ **"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer,**

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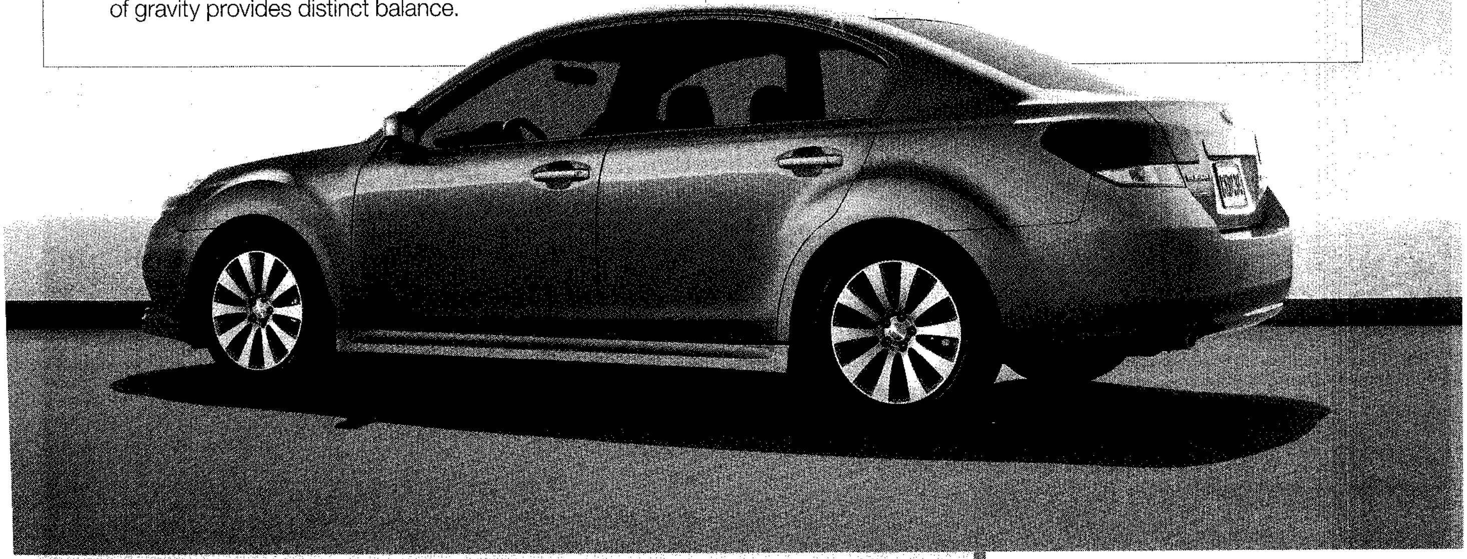

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# future reading

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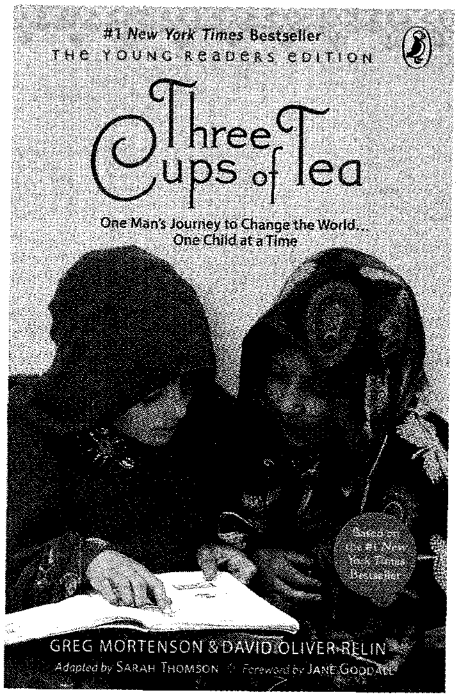
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THE YOUNG READERS EDITION
Three Cups of Tea
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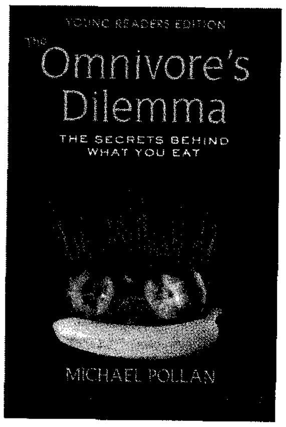
Based on the #1 New York Times Bestseller
GREG MORTENSON & DAVID OLIVER RELIN
Adapted by SARAH THOMSON
Foreword by JANE GOODALL

**"Three Cups of Tea: Young Readers Edition,"** by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, tells the stirring real-life account of Greg Mortenson. Having become lost in the Northern Areas of Pakistan after a failed attempt at climbing K2, Mortenson was saved by the impoverished residents of a small village. Shocked to learn that the villagers' children had no school, Mortenson vowed to return and help build one. Mortenson managed to build not just one but one hundred thirty-one schools—many for girls—in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. This young readers edition of the number-one *New York Times* Best-Seller helps to promote understanding amongst the different cultures of the world. A picture book version, "Listen to the Wind," is also available.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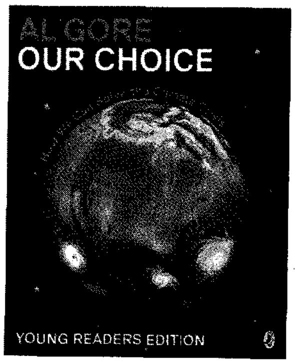
The Omnivore's Dilemma
THE SECRETS BEHIND WHAT YOU EAT
MICHAEL POLLAN

In **"The Omnivore's Dilemma: The Secrets Behind What You Eat,"** an adaptation of journalist Michael Pollan's renowned meditation on the food industry, young readers are encouraged to take into account the personal and global implications of their food choices. In an engaging format with updated facts, plenty of photos, graphs, and visuals, "The Omnivore's Dilemma" presents the next generation with a strong argument that will help change the way Americans eat.

As in the groundbreaking book "An Inconvenient Truth," former Vice President Al Gore's message in **"Our Choice: Young Readers Edition"** is clear: the way we currently live is taking a toll on our planet. Utilizing a lifetime of experience in politics, business, and activism, Gore goes beyond the main causes of the climate crisis and focuses on the bold choices necessary to slow the threat of global warming and stimulate sustainable economic progress in the process. The young readers edition, along with the adult version, will land on bookshelves everywhere on November 3rd.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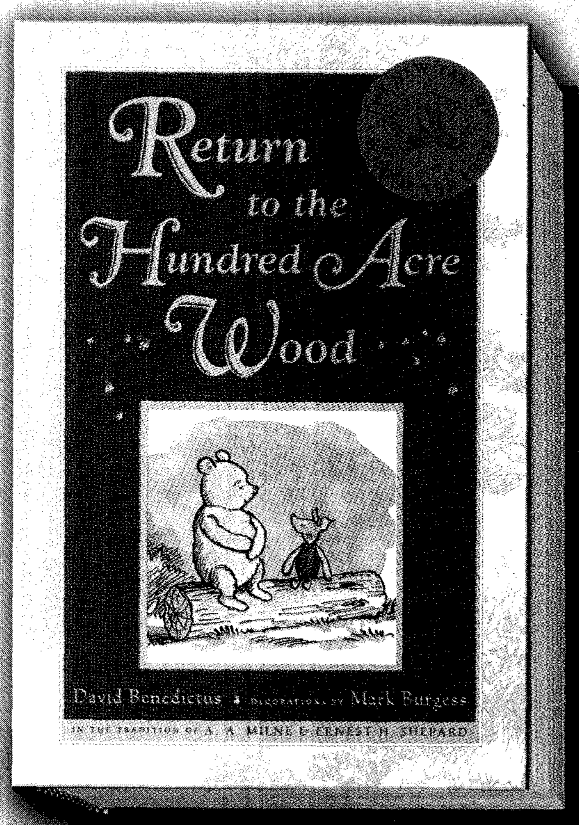

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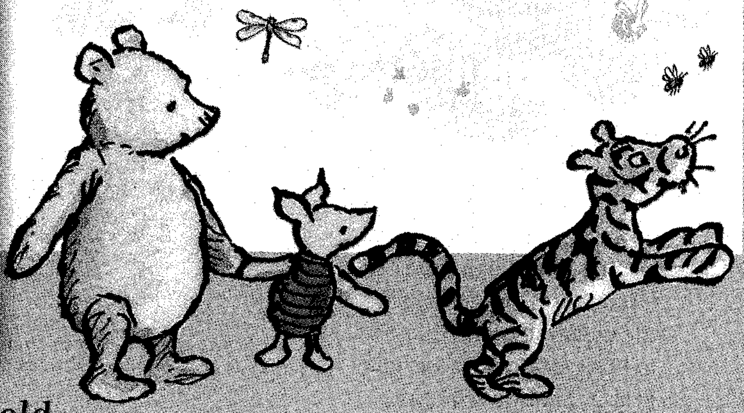

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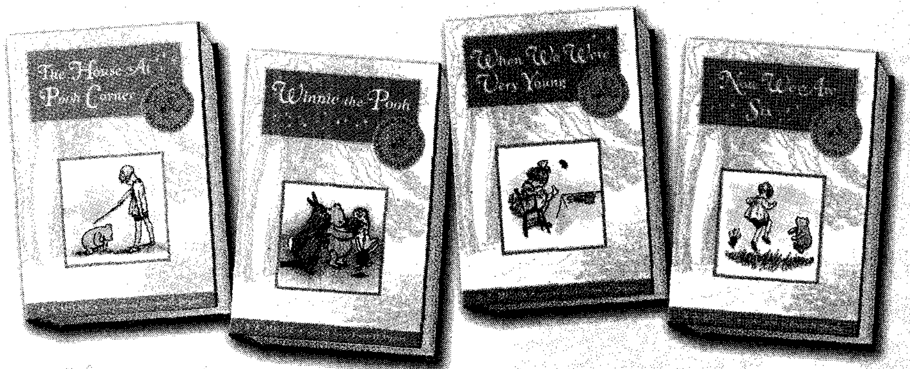
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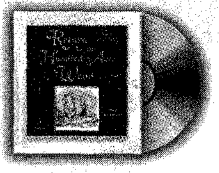

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## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## BRITISH SOUNDS

The components of "The Shout," which enjoys a rare screening at the Film Society of Lincoln Center on Oct. 13, Oct. 15, and Oct. 18, could scarcely be more varied. The film, released in 1978, was made in England and directed by Jerzy Skolimowski, a Pole. It comes from a tale by Robert Graves. The music is by two members of Genesis. And the tranquillity of the settings—the movie begins at a rural cricket match—is fractured by innumerable disturbances of the peace: the electronic inventions of a young composer (John Hurt), the matter-of-fact lusts of his wife (Susannah York), the reminiscences of a madman (Alan Bates), and, above all, the ululation of the title, said to bring death to those who hear it. Skolimowski, who had already plunged into the oddity of British life with "Deep End" (1971), delves even further here, fishing up evidence not just of sorcery and sexual possession but of the power that is wielded by tall tales; we never really find out whether Bates, whose smile is even more formidable than his frown, is reporting or embroidering the truth.

*—Anthony Lane*

Lost and Found." Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

**AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM**
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter."** Through March 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

**ASIA SOCIETY**
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

**DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA**
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas."** Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays, 1 to 4.)

**THE DRAWING CENTER**
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World."** Through Dec. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

**FRICK COLLECTION**
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

**GREY ART GALLERY**
100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—**"Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya."** Through Dec. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

**INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY**
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**JAPAN SOCIETY**
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

**MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM**
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Celebrating Puccini."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Where the Wild Things Are: Original Drawings by Maurice Sendak."** Through Nov. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO**
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Voces y Visiones: Four Decades through El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection."** Opens Oct. 17. ♦ **"Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis."** Opens Oct. 17. (Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

**MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City, Photographs by Joel Meyerowitz."** Through March 7. ♦ **"The Edge of New York: Waterfront Photographs."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**NEW MUSEUM**
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Emory Douglas: Black Panther."** Through Oct. 18. ♦ **"Dorothy Iannone: Lioness."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

**SCULPTURECENTER**
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"In Practice Fall 2009."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

**STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM**
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Hurvin Anderson."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"Artists in Residence: Khalif Kelly, Adam Pendleton, Dawit L. Petros."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

**KEIZO KITAJIMA**
The portraits in this Japanese photographer's exhibition were made between 1975 and 1991, primarily on the street but also in places ranging from dive bars off the U.S. Army base on Okinawa to New York's Danceteria. His best work is the earliest, which is dark and a bit disturbing, including shots of off-duty soldiers, working girls, and Tokyo drag queens. Some of these images were rephotographed for maximum grain and distortion, but even without this manipulation much of the later work has a similarly edgy, ominous mood reminiscent of Brassaï, Leon Levinstein, and Kitajima's teacher, Daido Moriyama. Color portraits taken on New York streets in the eighties swing toward grotesquerie, but that's why they're so unforgettable. Through Nov. 7. (Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

**JEFF WALL**
Wall, famous for big narrative photographs mounted in light boxes, has been moving away from dramatic images and toward low-key pseudo-documents that look like they might have been taken in passing. His new show of color and black-and-white pictures dispenses with light boxes and nearly all incident. What appear to be straightforward photographs (but are most likely staged) depict, among other subjects, a couple seated outdoors eating French fries from a paper bag, a man siphoning gas from a car, two people in separate booths at a pawnshop, and a shirtless, tattooed man throwing knives at a garage wall. Most of these pictures are uninteresting to a perverse degree, which makes them just as perversely fascinating. Through Oct. 30. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

### *Short List*

**BRASSAÏ:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Oct. 17. **ALLAN KAPROW:** Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970. Through Oct. 24. **RICHARD LEAROYD:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through Oct. 31. **MAYA LIN:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Nov. 13. **SARAH MCENEANEY:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through Oct. 24. **SALLY MANN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Oct. 31.

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**MARK BRADFORD / KARA WALKER**
The MacArthur "genius" grantees Walker (1997) and Bradford (this year) combine for a big, thumping show of formally muscular, socially nerve-racked picture-making (and sculpture and film, in Walker's case). Walker still, and with undiminished force, tends her nightmare garden of Old South fear, lust, and violence, teased out in malignant, disconcertingly sprightly narratives. Bradford's gorgeously layered and distressed surfaces of paint and collage split differences between poverty-stricken urban chaos and transcendent aesthetic composure, with valiant conviction on a grand scale. Through Oct. 17. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

JOHN RITTER

**SEBASTIAAN BREMER**
Bremer's hallucinatory pictures begin with photographs but quickly leave the specifics of the image and the medium behind. Working with inks and acrylics, he covers the prints with an intricate network of bubbles and spidery lines—an organic overlay that transforms the most ordinary image into a fever dream. Bremer's base photographs, both original and appropriated, include a snapshot of his father and brother, an aerial view of Rio de Janeiro, and a picture of two men meeting in a clearing in the woods. But each of these images seethes with infectious life, as if it were being eaten away from within by some Art Nouveau virus, at once dissolving and replicating. Is this the end of the world or a new beginning? Through Oct. 17. (Bravin Lee, 526 W. 26th St. 212-462-4404.)

**VINCENT FECTEAU**
Wonderful abstract sculptures in sanded and painted papier-mâché, less than two feet high by two or three feet at their broadest, set on low pedestals, slightly recall the recent ceramic marvels of Ken Price, minus organic metaphor and high finish. A funky studio air clings to complex forms of surpassing sophistication. Each piece is a thoroughly evolved aesthetic world unto itself, with a peculiar color—peach, violet, electric blue, forest green, hot grape—like a declaration of personality. The San Franciscan, born in 1969, induces surprise that, unceasing, deepens into awe. He isn't nearly well enough known. Through Oct. 24. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

**RAOUL DE KEYSER**
Drawings from three decades ago and new paintings bracket the Belgian master's quietly glorious career, as a lumpen modern abstractionist who makes songful expressiveness seem not just easy, but almost involuntary. He has ranged sideways, rather than progressed, in style, like a free-form, freehand Ellsworth Kelly. Economical, brushy shapes painted wet-in-wet, in amiable colors, on little canvases make allusions to landscape that you may note and promptly dismiss, the better to get in on a liftoff from outward to inner comprehension. Brain and heart crane to see over the shoulder of the eye, when a willing viewer beholds De Keyser's unassumingly perfect art. Through Oct. 24. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

**ANSELM REYLE / TAKASHI MURAKAMI**
Unreconstructed swank, from two boom-era avatars, makes for a show as exquisitely annoying as a hedge-funder's eight-figure golden parachute. Reyle poshes up motifs of minimalism and Arte Povera in chrome-plated sculpture and such lapidary japes as silvered hay bales and silvered, gilded, or empurpled junk assemblages. Murakami likewise, as always, emblematizes and solicits mad money, with a vast new canvas in which his grinning "China-lion" surmounts an arch of winsome human skulls. Labor-intensive surfaces exude subtly effulgent color effects that might disarm, if they didn't look so damned expensive. Through Oct. 24. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

**FRANK STELLA**
Stella has slicked up and prettified his recent modes of space-eating, mostly steel sculpture and "reliefs" (sculpture, incidentally attached to walls). Swooping planes, swirling vortices, and latticed channels, spray-painted in candy colors and stabilized with unpainted straight and curved pipes, afford kaleidoscopic pictorial unities as you stroll around them. If art works were cars, these, racy and overgrown-toy-like, would be Lamborghinis modified with rumble seats for the kids. Through Nov. 7. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

### *Short List*

**BERNADETTE CORPORATION:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Oct. 17. **TROY BRAUNTUCH:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Oct. 17. **EMILIE CLARK:** Morgan Lehman, 317 Tenth Ave., at 28th St. 212-268-6699. Opens Oct. 15. **JASON DODGE:** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through Oct. 24. **DENNIS HOPPER:** Shafrazi, 544 W. 26th St. 212-274-9300. Through Oct. 24. **JUSTINE KURLAND:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Opens Oct. 15.

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**MICHAEL PATTERSON-CARVER**
The self-taught, likable political artist returns with timely drawings of citizens bearing signs that plead "We need work" and of satiric tableaus that protest suffering in New Orleans, in prisons, and at the Mexican border. He targets malefactors both criminal and official, including Blue Dog Democrats who harass a stoic Barack Obama and servitors of "Calderon's Jobs Program"—handing out tourist maps to the United States. Patterson-Carver's clean line, soft colors, and humane dignity rise above rage to convey unquenchable hope amid harsh but just possibly remediable ills. He weaponizes charm. Through Oct. 18. (Small A Projects, 261 Broome St. 212-274-0761.)

**CARAGH THURING**
Breezily elegant abstractions of fragmented landscapes confirm the Belgian-born Londoner as a rising star of painting. Thinly limned, brushed, and dribbled on raw linen, in colors like pastels left out in the rain, piquant and sometimes referential shapes (a boat, a ladder, trees) keep their own counsel amidst fiestas of no-big-deal inspiration. Art-historical allusions—to Manet's "Déjeuner" and, via that, to Titian—emerge when sought. These are dubious longueurs, nudging work of promising originality toward academic pastiche. Truly clever artists, of whom Thuring might be one, don't so kittenishly advertise their cleverness. Through Nov. 1. (Preston, 301 Broome St. 212-431-1105.)

### *Short List*

**JULIA GOLDMAN:** Museum 52, at 4 E. 2nd St. 347-789-7072. Opens Oct. 15. **JUSTIN MATHERLY:** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Nov. 1. **MY BARBARIAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Oct. 18. **ADAM PUTNAM:** Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212. Through Oct. 17. **"THE BICHON FRISÉ IN ART":** Art Since the Summer of '69, at 195 Chrystie St. 347-208-5437. Through Oct. 25.

## DANCE

**SHEETAL GANDHI**
A performer who straddles modern dance and Broadway, Gandhi shifts seamlessly in and out of monologue, movement, and song, and from one character to the next, throughout her one-woman show, "Bahu-Beti-Biwi" ("Daughter-in-Law, Daughter, Wife"), part of the 2nd National Asian American Theatre Festival. The subject matter is standard issue—the travails of Indian womanhood and the tensions between generations—but it comes across amusingly, as traditional dance is inflected with hip-hop locking, and Hindustani classical music is updated with English lyrics such as "Why can't I wear a tank top?" (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 13 and Oct. 15 at 7, Oct. 16 at 9:30, Oct. 17 at 8, and Oct. 18 at 3.)

**BALLETTO TEATRO DI TORINO**
At the Joyce, the troupe will perform two programs of works by its resident choreographer, Matteo Levaggi. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 13-14 at 7:30, Oct. 15-16 at 8, Oct. 17 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 18 at 2 and 7:30.)

**GIBNEY DANCE**
In "View Partially Obstructed," the objects obstructing our view are movable, scrim-covered panels onto which are projected kaleidoscopic visuals, manipulated by Joshue Ott on the fly. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444. Oct. 13-17 at 8.)

**INKBOAT/COKASEKI**
"Ame to Ame," a title that plays on the Japanese homophones for "candy" and "rain," tilts off of Butoh clichés into a more diverting realm. All in white amid a like-colored chair, stool, and table, the girlish Yuko Kaseki and the top-knotted, shirtless Shinichi Iova-Koga negotiate high-contrast switches between the anguished grimaces of Butoh past and

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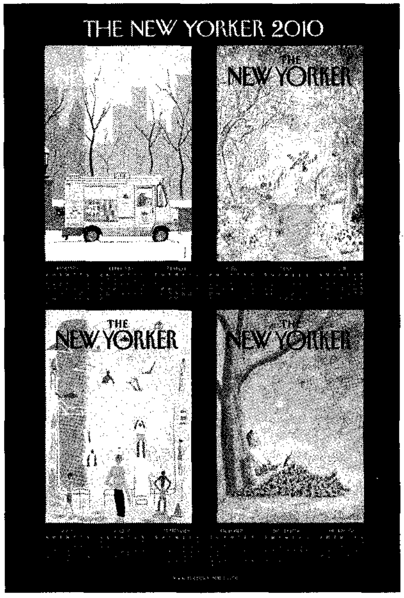

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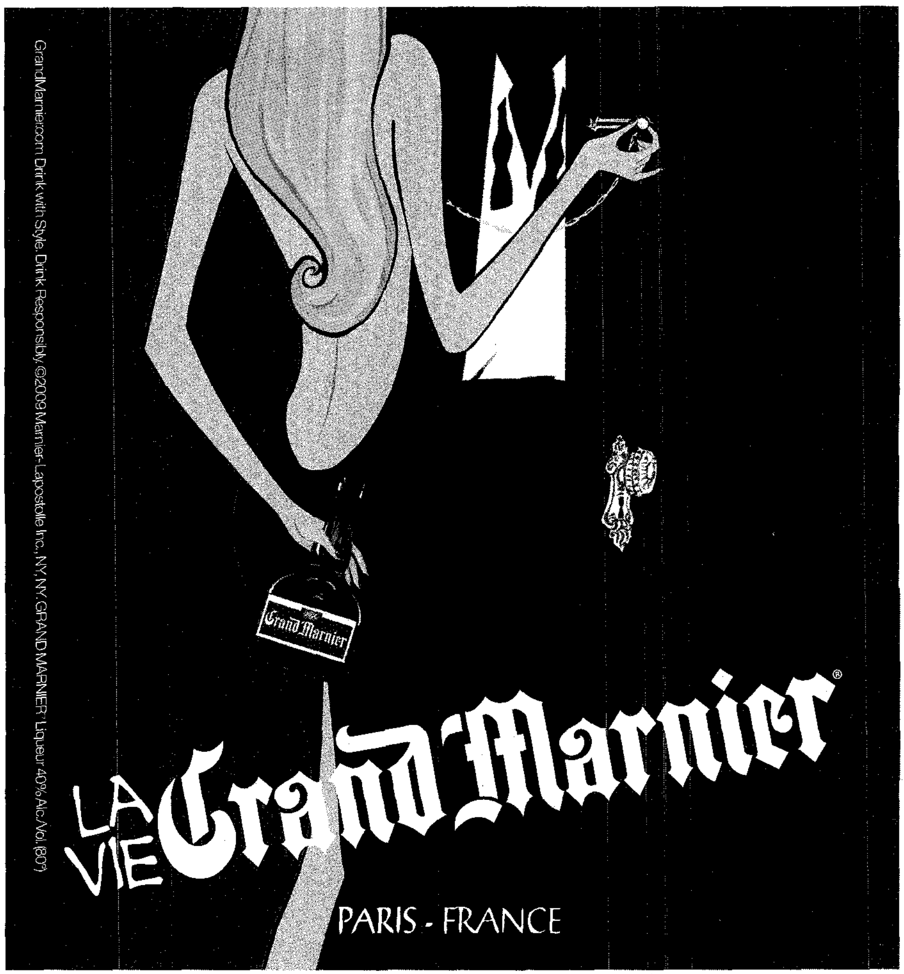
the physical comedy of the silent era—manic chases, sleepwalking, and furniture pulled out from under. Theirs is a quirky romance, and its tender moments culminate in a drunken waltz. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Oct. 15-17 at 7:30.)

**"OTHER SUNS"**
In the last few years, the modern-dance veteran Margaret Jenkins has been specializing in transnational collaborations; "Other Suns," at Montclair University, resulted from a partnership with the Guangdong Modern Dance Company, China's first modern-dance troupe, which débuted in 1990 (the celebrated choreographer Shen Wei was an original member). The piece is a meditation on symmetry and balance, and also, inevitably, a study of the contrasts between the smooth, supple movement of the Guangdong dancers and the more grounded, sharp delivery of Jenkins's American counterparts. (Alexander Kasser, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Oct. 15-16 at 7:30, Oct. 17 at 8, and Oct. 18 at 3.)



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**VANESSA JUSTICE DANCE**
In "Flatland," Justice is going for the sublime, in Edmund Burke's sense: astonishment so overwhelming it's touched with horror. Her method is overdetermination, layering animation, a film excerpt, sound from David Lynch's "Eraserhead," and assorted purposeful non sequiturs on top of a gracefully patterned trio. The multiplying levels of interpretation could knock you flat. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 15-17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 3.)

**CYNTHIA OLIVER/COCO DANCE THEATRE**
Raised in the Virgin Islands, Oliver has often addressed the contradictions of Caribbean identity in her equally vocal and visceral dances. "Rigidigidim De Bamba De: Ruptured Calypso" concentrates on a congenial form for her, the rhythmic social commentary of calypso. Six women, from Canada, England, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Trinidad, and Jamaica, forage for commonalities across borders of various kinds. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 15-17 at 8.)

**"FRIDAYS AT NOON"**
As part of its free series, the 92nd Street Y presents a potpourri of Irish step dance. Four local companies will show their work, including Darrah Carr Dance, which blends Irish step with contemporary dance, in a style they call "ModERIN," Solas An Lae, which also performs in soft shoe, and two all-kid troupes: Keltic Dreams and Niall O'Leary Junior Irish Dance Company. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 16 at noon.)

**"GRRRLESQUE"**
Victoria Libertore, the darkly humorous performance artist also known as Howling Vic, dons her blue-wigged Liza persona as curator and host of two separate lineups of female burlesque artists at Dance New Amsterdam. Evening One is graced by Honi Harlow, Nasty Canasta, Plum Manchego, and Aimee Norwich's Mini Orchestra. Evening Two embraces Darlinda Just Darlinda, Dulce de Leche, Fetchin' Gretchen, the Bill Murray Experience, and more. The availability of wine and beer helps loosen things up. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-625-8369. Oct. 16-17 at 9:30.)

**CEDAR LAKE CONTEMPORARY BALLET/"ORBO NOVO"**
It was quite a coup when the young Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet nabbed the Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. In "Orbo Novo," he explores the rugged terrain of consciousness after a stroke, based on the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor's articulate account of her own experience. Cherkaoui blends fragmented narratives with bursts and waves of movement in vignettes that examine the dissolution of the self, disconnection, and a strange sort of bliss. The dance is well served by Szymon Brzoska's cinematic score (played live) and a striking movable set of latticed walls. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 20 at 7:30. Through Oct. 25.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC
## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**
The new Luc Bondy production of **"Tosca,"** with Karita Mattila, Marcelo Álvarez, and George Gagnidze in the leading roles; Joseph Colaneri conducts. (Oct. 14 and Oct. 17 at 8.) ♦ Bartlett Sher's saucy and ebullient production of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** returns to the schedule, with Joyce DiDonato as its Rosina and with Barry Banks, Rodion Pogossov, John Del Carlo, and Orlin Anastassov completing the cast; Maurizio Benini. (Oct. 15 at 8.) ♦ A formidable trio of singers—Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, and Miah Persson—take the leading roles in a revival of a great Met favorite, Strauss and Hofmannsthal's sumptuous **"Der Rosenkavalier."** Edo de Waart, a veteran Straussian who shapes his performances with interpretive discipline and scrupulous musicality, conducts. (Oct. 16 and Oct. 19 at 7:30.) ♦ A performance of the Sonja Frisell production of **"Aida,"** with towering sets and a cast of hundreds of singers, dancers, and supernumeraries, is a permanent attraction in the Met's repertory. This revival—well cast, as usual, with Violeta Urmana, Dolora Zajick, Johan Botha, and Carlo Guelfi in the leading roles—includes new choreography by Alexei Ratmansky; the estimable Daniele Gatti conducts. (Oct. 17 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

**LITTLE OPERA THEATRE OF NEW YORK**
The Russian nationalist composers of the late nineteenth century, attempting to forge a distinctive style based on native speech rhythms, were strongly attracted to the "Little Tragedies" of Alexander Pushkin. (Dargomïzhsky started the trend with "The Stone Guest.") The company offers a double bill of Rimsky-Korsakov's **"Mozart and Salieri"** and Cui's **"A Feast in a Time of Plague,"** hoping they will shine in English translation. (Hudson Guild Theatre, 441 W. 26th St. 212-868-4444. Oct. 14 and Oct. 16-17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 3.)

**AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: D'INDY'S "FERVAAL"**
Depending on your point of view, Vincent d'Indy's 1897 opera, a free adaptation of Celtic myth, is either a post-Wagnerian paean to racial and religious purity or a highly individual masterpiece of dramatic craft. Perhaps it is both; Leon Botstein—who has become Gotham's leading champion of French opera—conducts the American première, a concert performance that features the tenor Dwayne Jones, the mezzo-soprano Deanne Meek, and the baritone Donnie Ray Albert. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 14 at 8.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**JOHN ELIOT GARDINER: "HAYDN AFTER MOZART"**
The British early-music magus leads his personal ensembles, the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and the Monteverdi Choir, in Haydn's two magnificent oratorios, each penned after the death of his admired younger colleague; the vocal soloists include the soprano Lucy Crowe and the tenor James Gilchrist. Oct. 15 at 8: "The Seasons." ♦ Oct. 17 at 8: "The Creation." (Carnegie Hall. 212-847-7800.)

**"THE MOVADO HOUR": THE KNIGHTS**
Few ensembles are as adept at mixing old music with new as the dynamic young Brooklyn orchestra, which performs music for strings by Vivaldi, Purcell, and Scelsi in the Baryshnikov Arts Center's stylish series. (450 W. 37th St. Oct. 19 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-868-4444.)

## RECITALS

**CHRISTINE BREWER**
The invaluable American dramatic soprano, with the respected pianist Craig Rutenberg, offers a recital of classic German repertory (songs by Strauss and Wagner's "Wesendonck Lieder") as well as lighter fare (including several of Britten's cabaret songs). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 14 at 7:30.)

**(LE) POISSON ROUGE: MURCOF/FRANCESCO TRISTANO SCHLIMÉ**
Ronen Givony's "Wordless Music" series, combining classical with indie rock, has a natural home at the unfettered downtown music club. The next concert features sets from Fernando Corena's one-man band as well as from the young Luxembourg pianist, who concentrates on music by Frescobaldi. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Oct. 14 at 7:30.)

**BAM: "IMAGINARY CITY"**
Italo Calvino's 1972 novel, "Invisible Cities," inspired the members of the superb New York ensemble So Percussion to explore the musical aspects of the beauty of urban environments, a theme they pursue in collaboration with the director Rinde Eckert and the video artist Jenise Treuting. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 14-17 at 7:30.)

**MITSUKO UCHIDA**
The last three piano sonatas of Beethoven—including No. 32 in C Minor—make up the magisterial pianist's latest recital, which takes place at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Oct. 14 at 8.)

**"INTERPRETATIONS" SERIES: DAAN VANDEWALLE**
You don't hear Belgian contemporary music every day in New York. The intrepid pianist is the next attraction in Thomas Buckner's series at Roulette, performing works from the avant-garde by Gordon Mumma, Alvin Curran, and several composers from home. (20 Greene St. 212-219-8242. Oct. 15 at 8.)

**"MM ARTISTS IN CONCERT"**
Sterling performances are commonplace in this series, headed by the cellist Edward Arron. The next concert is an especially intimate one, with the violinist Colin Jacobsen and the violist Nicholas Cords joining him in works by Mozart (the Duo for Violin and Viola in B-Flat Major) and Gubaidulina ("Rejoice!," a sonata for violin and cello) and finally in Mozart's grand Divertimento for String Trio, K. 563. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 16 at 7.)

**PUNCH BROTHERS**
Chris Thile, the virtuoso mandolin player and breakout bluegrass-classical star, joins his high-class string band for an evening of vital, genre-stretching explorations. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 at 8.)

**TAKÁCS QUARTET**
The earthy but elegant ensemble offers a concert of impassioned music in its upcoming Zankel Hall recital—quartets by Schumann, the complex neo-Romantic Wolfgang Rihm (a première), and Beethoven (the "Razumovsky" Quartet No. 1 in F Major). (212-247-7800. Oct. 17 at 7:30.)

**"COMPOSER PORTRAIT: IANNIS XENAKIS"**
In a prime example of the hard-edged modernism that Miller Theatre likes, the superb International Contemporary Ensemble will give exciting performances of a selection of the Greek master's music—including the valedictory "O-Mega," played and conducted by the percussionist Steven Schick. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Oct. 17 at 8.)

**DÉNES VÁRJON**
Hungarian music (and musicians) will be a recurrent feature of the 92nd Street Y's programming this season. The young pianist kicks off its fall concerts by performing works by Schubert, Bach, Kurtág, Bartók, and Liszt, among others, assisted by the pianist Izabella Simon. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 17 at 8.)

**JOY IN SINGING GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY**
Paul Sperry, the current music director of the valuable organization that promotes young singers, has programmed a concert in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary that features an array of vocalists who have won Joy in Singing prizes in the past, including Meagan Miller, Darynn Zimmer, André Solomon-Glover, and Thomas Meglioranza. The program includes songs by Brahms, Mahler, Rachmaninoff, Libby Larsen, and John Musto. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 17 at 8.)

**BARGEMUSIC: DAEDALUS QUARTET**
The young yet refined American string quartet joins the clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein (a 2009 winner of the Avery Fisher Career Grant) in a program of music by Haydn, Paul Ben-Haim, and Brahms (the Clarinet Quintet). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Oct. 17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 3. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

**PAUL APPLEBY AND STEVEN BLIER**
Blier, the co-director of New York Festival of Song, has put together a piquant program of music by Grieg, Roussel, Buchardo, and Britten (several arrangements of Irish folk songs), accompanying the prominent young tenor in a recital sponsored by the Marilyn Horne Foundation. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. 212-582-2000. Oct. 18 at 3.)

**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**
Folk music provides the inspiration for the Society's next concert, a program in which such musicians as the pianists Alessio Bax and Anne-Marie McDermott and the Orion String Quartet perform works by Brahms, Bartók (the Third Quartet), Dohnányi, and David Del Tredici (the New York première of "Magyar Madness," with the exciting clarinettist David Krakauer). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Oct. 18 at 5.)

**EMMA KIRKBY**
With her small but pure soprano, Emma Kirkby helped define the sound of the early-music movement when it was gathering full steam. She makes a rare New York appearance (with the lutenist Jakob Lindberg) at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. (212-247-7800. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

**REBEL: "IRREGULAR PEARLS"**
The Morgan Library & Museum's bright little concert hall should be an appealing space in which to take in a program by the superb New York Baroque band, which will offer a selection of courtly music by Purcell, Rossi, Corelli, and Handel. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

## MOVIES OPENING

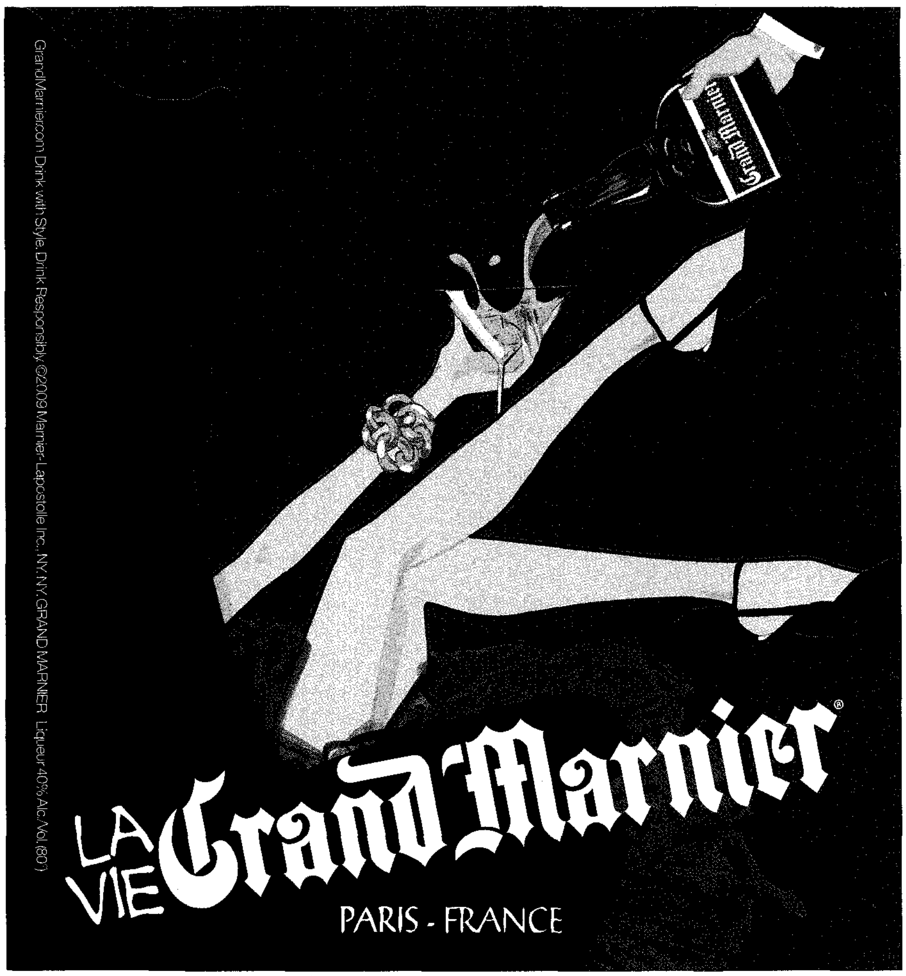
**LAW ABIDING CITIZEN**
In this thriller, directed by F. Gary Gray and starring Jamie Foxx and Gerard Butler, a man pursues his family's killers after a plea bargain sets them free. Opening Oct. 16. (In wide release.)

**THE LITTLE TRAITOR**
Alfred Molina stars in this historical drama, set in 1947 and based on a novel by Amos Oz, about a British soldier who befriends a Jewish boy in Palestine. Directed by Lynn Roth. Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)

**THE MAID**
Sebastian Silva directed this drama, about a longtime maid in Santiago, Chile, whose job is threatened. In Spanish. Opening Oct. 16. (Angelika Film Center.)

**NEW YORK, I LOVE YOU**
Eleven vignettes about New York City, directed by Fatih Akin, Yvan Attal, Allen Hughes, Shunji Iwai, Shekhar Kapur, Joshua Marston, Mira Nair, Natalie Portman, Brett Ratner, Jiang Wen, and Andrey Zvyaginstev. Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)

**THE STEPFATHER**
Nelson McCormick directed this remake of the 1987 thriller, about a young man who comes home from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boarding school and finds that his mother has a mysterious new boyfriend. Starring Dylan Walsh, Penn Badgley, and Sela Ward. Opening Oct. 16. (In wide release.)

**WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 16. (In wide release.)

## NOW PLAYING

**ARAYA**
This majestic documentary portrait from 1959, of several families on Venezuela's vast and arid salt-marsh peninsula, is the only feature film by its director, Margot Benacerraf. Its arresting first images of sea and sky evoke a vast historical arc in which her modern-day subjects—mainly, a seemingly timeless horde of salt miners on their rugged and monotonous rounds—gradually emerge from teeming anonymity. The Pereda family, like others in the area, exerts itself mightily to build a literal pyramid of salt, only to break it down into sacks of salt for sale. At the nearby sand beach, the Ortiz family, which survives through fishing, carefully calculates what it must consume and what it can afford to sell. Benacerraf's grandiose style captures the drama of subsistence in the face of glorious but indifferent nature; the overwhelming beauty of the wide-open spaces contrasts with the workers' long and burdened trudges through them. Following her characters into their villages and their homes, the director offers a wealth of touching details but little intimacy and few ideas, avoiding with equal discretion both the subjects' inner lives and all wider political context—though the last sequence, showing the inroads of industrialization, makes a viewer wonder what's going on in Araya today. In Spanish.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

**THE BOYS ARE BACK**
A father (Clive Owen) and his two sons work their way through grief in this piece of generic moviemaking, directed by Scott Hicks. Based on a memoir by Simon Carr, it hits the standard notes of family redemption (undisciplined children learn control, messy homes get tidied, the understanding single mom next door offers a warm welcome) on its way toward the inevitable feel-good conclusion. Owen's strong and subtle performance is the only thing the film has to recommend it; he avoids the histrionics that usually sink stories like this in a well of tears.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

**BRIGHT STAR**
In 1818, a half-educated but boldly self-possessed beauty named Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish) captures the admiration, and then the love, of a tubercular young man (Ben Whishaw). He's a most unpromising fellow: sometimes spirited and funny, yet often sunk in quiet and seemingly remote unhappiness. The writer-director, Jane Campion ("The Piano"), does not play up the irony that the young man, John Keats, would soon be known, despite much early dismissal of his work, as one of the greatest poets in English since Shakespeare and Milton. The movie is not the kind of portentous bio-pic in which history, like some sort of hooded eagle, perches on the shoulders of every scene, waiting to soar. As much as she can, Campion keeps the action day-by-day, small-scale, and casually lyrical. Many of Whishaw and Cornish's scenes together have a high-spirited delicacy that borders on the precious and then safely pulls back to the everyday. Campion makes only one serious mistake: Whishaw recites the lines "Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast / To feel for ever its soft swell and fall" when he is actually resting his head on Cornish's chest. The period re-creation, sure-handed yet unemphatic, is extraordinary. With Paul Schneider as Keats's protector and amanuensis, Charles Brown.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/21/09.) (In wide release.)

**CANDYMAN**
An intrepid female graduate student ventures into Chicago's inner city, camera in hand, and falls prey to a bogeyman who carves up disbelievers with a hook. The academic is that mischievous-eyed blonde Virginia Madsen, and the Candyman (Tony Todd) is black; the racial brinkmanship is the film's most original and effective gimmick. Madsen gives a juicy B-picture performance, throwing herself into each absurd display of hubris, but the movie is just a gory campfire tale. The writer-director, Bernard Rose, adapted Clive Barker's short story "The Forbidden." Released in 1992.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Oct. 19.)

**CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY**
Capitalism, according to Michael Moore: a system of organized theft in which the rich forever rob the poor. Moore gathers random examples of greedy behavior—for instance, a juvenile detention center in Pennsylvania that is run for profit, in which sentences for minor offenses are mysteriously extended. And he celebrates mini-revolts, as when the workers at Republic Windows and Doors, in Chicago, refused to leave when they were summarily fired. It's hard to quarrel with his anger over hardworking Americans who are tossed out of a job or a house, or with his grief over the fate of his home town, Flint, Michigan, the subject of his first success, "Roger and Me," twenty years ago. Moore has never recovered emotionally from the closing of the G.M. plants there. In the movie's most touching moment, he accompanies his father, now very old, as he stares in horror at the flattened wasteland where the plant he worked at once stood. But Moore is so mesmerized by Flint's tragedies that he thinks G.M. went bankrupt because it closed plants in the eighties. Modern capitalism, with its torrential flow of money across borders, is beyond him. It's a sad movie—funny in spots, but wounded and bewildered.—*D.D.* (10/5/09) (In wide release.)

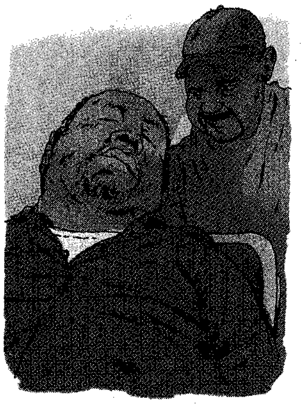
**COCO BEFORE CHANEL**
Fulfilling the promise of its title, Anne Fontaine's film lifts the veil on the early years of Gabrielle Chanel. This is no guarantee of the naked truth, since, as Chanel's biographers admit, she was ferociously adept at cloaking her unmodish past in legend and lies; but our heroine's progress, nonetheless, has an air of plausibility—from the small, suffering lass at the orphanage to an unsuccessful tavern singer who segues smartly into a kept woman. The keepers are, first, a jolly landowner (Benoît Poelvoorde), and, second, a suspiciously smooth British heartbreaker named Boy (Alessandro Nivola). (Did Chanel, no fool, not realize that, under the rules of romance, you should never fall for a man called Boy?) These actors fare slightly better than Audrey Tautou, who launches into the lead role but seems unable to quell her natural cuteness; the real Coco could not have achieved what she did, you feel, without being as hard as chrome. Fashion followers, panting to see some classic Chanel designs, may feel cheated, since the movie halts precisely as her business gets going; there is a curious afterthought, before the final credits, in which modern supermodels traipse past the grande dame herself, but it's not clear what period—or what sort of ghostly fantasy—we are being invited to watch.—*Anthony Lane* (9/28/09) (In wide release.)

**A CORNER IN WHEAT**
In its fourteen minutes, D. W. Griffith's stark and subtle adaptation, from 1909, of a novel by the muckraking realist Frank Norris offers a surprisingly novelistic scope and grandeur. The story concerns a commodities trader whose successful speculations win him a monopoly on the world's wheat, doubling the cost of bread and wreaking havoc among the poor. Eschewing his famously probing psychological closeups, Griffith hews his tale out of vast, weighty blocks of action (the first five minutes contain just five shots). Intertwining the fate of three characters—the farmer, the baker, and the speculator—he invokes a mood of impending cataclysm and infuses it with a moral gravity of Biblical proportions. The willfully unadorned visual rhetoric, which Griffith ingeniously heightens through an increasingly contrapuntal editing scheme, conjures an air of Old Testament vengeance and righteous awe.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Oct. 14-16.)

**THE DAMNED UNITED**
A great real-life sports story—the brief and catastrophic 1974 tenure of the arrogant, telegenic soccer coach Brian Clough at the helm of the best British club, Leeds United—is here reduced to the lowest common denominator. Peter Morgan's script, based on a novel by David Peace, jumps around from 1968, when Clough's prior club, Derby County, first crossed paths with Leeds, to the mid-seventies, and the result is too much information, and too little. Each segment of the sprawling story feels boiled down to the

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## LAND OF LOSS

"Broke-ology" (directed by Thomas Kail, at the Mitzi E. Newhouse), by the talented thirty-year-old African-American playwright Nathan Lewis Jackson, belongs to the now familiar genre of family leave-takings. What



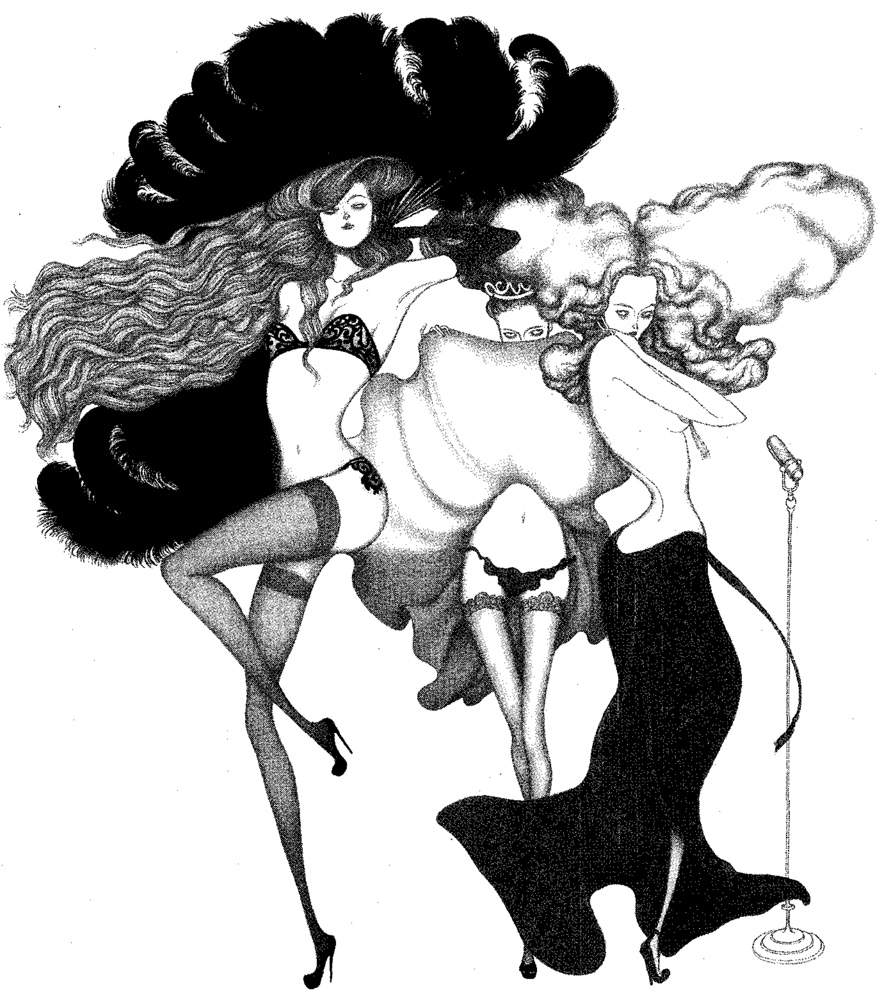
Jackson lacks in poetry and in stagecraft he makes up for in compassion. Here, in a Kansas City ghetto, two brothers—one stuck, the other educated—cope with the rapid deterioration of their beloved father, who has multiple sclerosis. We're in the land of loss, but not lamentation. Jackson's characters love and laugh, dance and argue in a way that honors their bittersweet survival. Tender emotions are much harder to achieve onstage than pathological ones; it's a pleasure to see goodness, not hate, dissected. Jackson's dialogue doesn't crackle, but it certainly pops with humor. An outstanding cast, which includes Crystal A. Dickinson, Francois Battiste, and Alano Miller, is headed by the poignant Wendell Pierce, as the declining patriarch William King, whose last act of love is to find a way to set his sons free.

—*John Lahr*

VICTOR MARCHAND KERLOW

TODAY
Thinking green
TOMORROW
Planning for blue

bare minimum; the episodes that remain hook up in obvious ways and never dig deep into character or incident. The drama converges around Clough's personal animosity toward Leeds's grizzled, beloved former coach Don Revie (Colm Meaney) and his self-destructive ways of slaking his resentment. But Michael Sheen, as the flamboyant Clough, seems oddly tamped-down and merely slick rather than ebullient; though Timothy Spall is quietly hearty as Peter Taylor, Clough's second-in-command, the director, Tom Hooper, does his cast no favors by concluding with actual archival clips of Clough and Taylor: their seductive vigor and devilish sparkle evoke depths unsounded by this superficial drama.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)



*At Dance New Amsterdam, Victoria Libertore hosts a burlesque show, "Grrrlesque."*

LAURA LAINE

**FAME**

"Dancing with the Stars" meets "American Idol" in this tepid remake of the seminal 1980 hit. Reality TV has basically sucked the life from stories about talented people in search of fame, and this film brings little novelty to the formula. It covers four years at New York's High School for the Performing Arts, and although the young cast of unknowns (including Naturi Naughton, Asher Book, and Kherington Payne) is up for the challenge, the script, by Allison Burnett, gives them only a slender platform for their considerable talents. There are some energetic music and dance sequences by the director, Kenny Tancharoen, but the viewer is rarely made to feel he's doing more than channel-surfing.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

**THE INFORMANT!**

At first, we think that Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon, with a wavy pompadour and steel-rimmed glasses) is the epitome of Midwestern square. In 1992, Whitacre, an executive at the agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland, was part of a price-fixing scheme. Trapped, he begins collaborating with the F.B.I., wearing a wire in meetings with colleagues. He turns into a foolish risk-taker, a kind of electrified dork who imagines himself a hero out of the movies. He gets results, and the Justice Department builds its case. But then, by degrees, everything he says begins to sound false. One lie encases another, and then another. We're shocked, and the director, Steven Soderbergh, moves swiftly and surely through short scenes, keeping the style thoroughly ambiguous—lodged somewhere between thriller and farce. "The Informant!," based on a true story, is a full-scale production with locations all over the globe, yet it's also an aggressively perverse joke. By the end, the movie becomes a minor classic about the unreliability of judgment and the instability of truth. Scott Z. Burns, working freely with Kurt Eichenwald's 2000 book, wrote the screenplay. With Scott Bakula and also such comedians as Joel McHale and Tom Papa, who give their lines slightly ironic inflections—a pause, a smile—that throw the scenes off kilter.—*D.D.* (9/21/09) (In wide release.)

**THE INVENTION OF LYING**

No one has ever lied, and deception is unknown. Such is the truth-loving, and downright creepy, world that is presented in this new comedy, written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Matthew Robinson. Gervais also stars as Mark, a chubby loser who spends his time bemoaning his fate as a chubby loser; some of the moans are in voice-over, others are directed at unsympathetic colleagues—the driest of them played by Tina Fey and Rob Lowe—or at the beauty (Jennifer Garner) whom Mark unfruitfully craves. Then, one day, he tells a lie (or, as he puts it, "I said something that wasn't"), and, from that point onward, the movie allows him free rein; he can devise hitherto unimaginable plots for the movie studio where he works and console the lonely with false reassurances, which they gladly accept. This is promising territory, but most of it goes to waste, as the film staggers and veers between a snarling sendup of religious faith and a mawkish, low-energy attempt at rom-com; love will find a way, Gervais appears to insist, resorting to the oldest fiction of all. With a suspicious number of cameo appearances, including one by his regular collaborator Stephen Merchant and another by Edward Norton.—*A.L.* (10/12/09) (In wide release.)

**A SERIOUS MAN**

The Coen brothers in their black, bleak, belittling mode, and, except for a few moments, it's hell to sit through. The movie, set in a Minneapolis suburb in 1967, is a deadpan farce about middle-class bad taste (Jewish division), with a schlemiel Job as its hero—Professor Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a physicist at a local university whose life is falling apart. Gopnik's wife (Sari Lennick) is leaving him for a sanctimonious bastard (Fred Melamed) who covers his aggressions against Larry with limp-pawed caresses and offers of "understanding." Larry's kids are thieving brats, and his sick, whining brother (Richard Kind) camps out on the living-room couch and refuses to look for work. There's more, much more, including a series of mishaps, sordid betrayals, and weird coincidences, but Larry, a sweet guy and "a serious man"—upright, a good teacher, a caring father—won't hit back. One wonders what kind of revenge the Coens are enacting; whatever indignities they suffered as teens, they can't have been much affected by them as grownups. Shot with mainly local actors in a super-hard-focus style by Roger Deakins. As a work of film craftsmanship, the movie is fascinating; in every other way, it's insufferable.—*D.D.* (10/5/09) (In wide release.)

**SURROGATES**

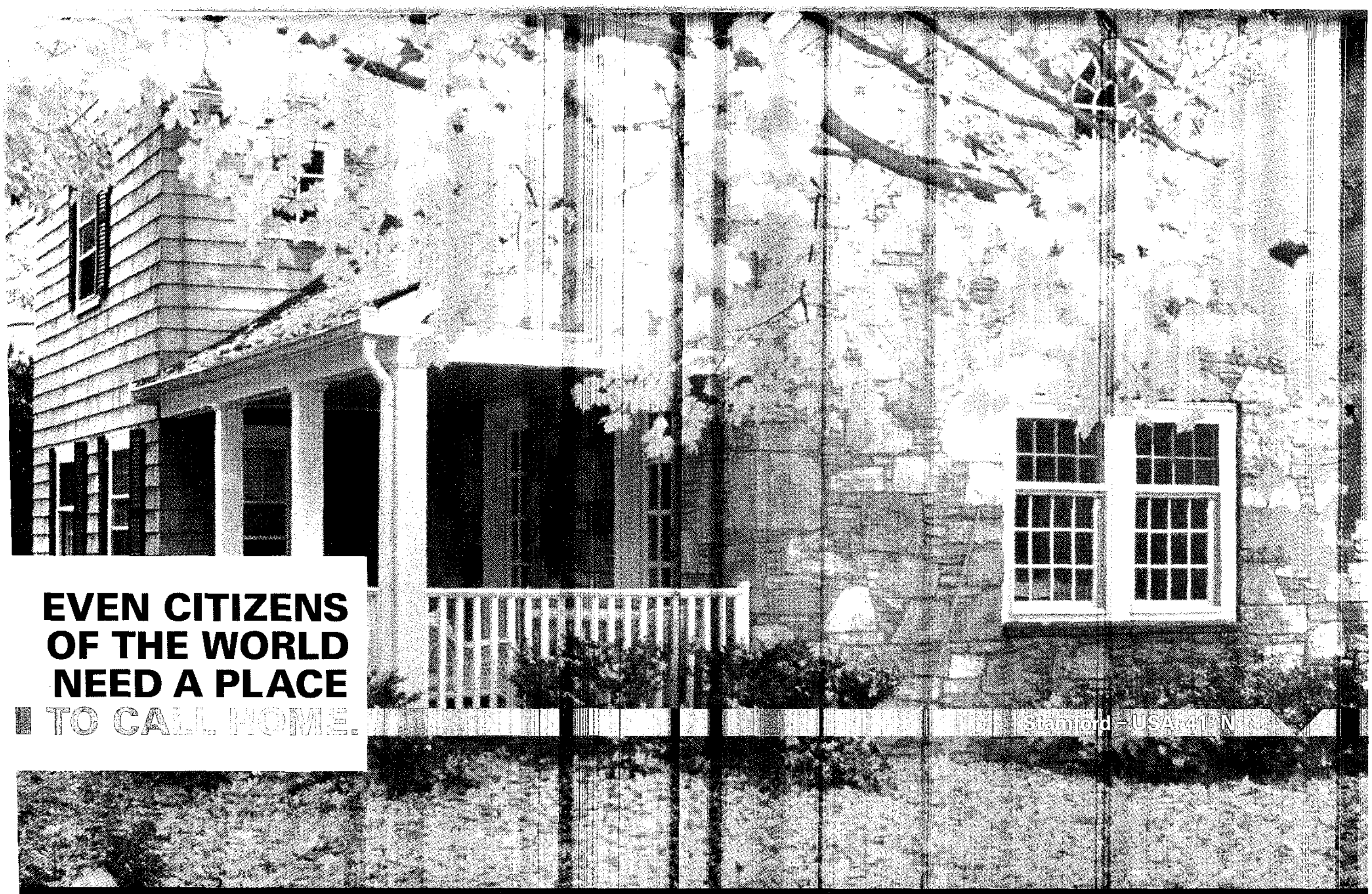
A nonsensical sci-fi film that's a guilty treat. The director Jonathan Mostow's eighty-eight-minute futuristic robot thriller stars Bruce Willis as an F.B.I. agent who investigates the death of a man and his surrogate. (In the future, people can wire themselves into a virtual world where they can live out their dreams.) The film's crafty cautionary message of technology's seduction of humanity is gleefully presented, and Mostow, who's adept at tight thrill machines ("Breakdown"), breezes through the story with glossy action sequences that are clever as well as exciting.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

**THE TREE, THE MAYOR, AND THE MÉDIATHÈQUE**

This richly discursive political caprice, filled with intriguing effluvia of French electoral infighting, is, surprisingly, one of Éric Rohmer's most personal films. The story is set in a village in the Vendée—a famously royalist redoubt—where Julien Dechaumes (Pascal Greggory), the Socialist mayor, seeks to build a high-profile cultural center in order to propel himself into national affairs. But Marc Rossignol (Fabrice Luchini), the local schoolmaster, can't bear to lose the bucolic sward it would occupy and inveighs against it to anyone who will listen. Meanwhile, there's smart side business involving Julien's novelist girlfriend (Arielle Dombasle), a Parisian journalist (Clémentine Amouroux), and a chance encounter between the antagonists' young daughters (Galaxie Barbouth and Jessica Schwing). If the scintillating dialectics hold center stage—mainly through Luchini's electrifying verbal virtuosity—what they conjure is nothing less than a comprehensive sense of life. Less an anti-modernist than a sensual conservative, Rohmer derides bureaucracy, presents an exemplary domesticated romance, exalts charming traditions, and expounds, in comic form, his techno-utopia. His ideas are, above all, cinematic: his moderation of tempo and respect for space are as much a matter of politics as of aesthetics, and the film's first closeup—near the end—is as much of a moral jolt as a visual one. Released in 1993. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Oct. 20.)

**THE YES MEN FIX THE WORLD**

Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum founded the Yes Men, a loose coöperative of cultural agitators who fake their way into business conferences and make outrageous proposals in an effort to call attention to corporate malfeasance. This documentary, which they co-directed with Kurt Engfehr, showcases some of their latest targets, including the New Orleans housing-recovery program and Halliburton. The Yes Men's best gonzo act is aimed at Dow Chemical's refusal to clean up a factory in Bhopal, India, where, in 1984, the largest chemical accident in history occurred (five thousand people died): Bichlbaum poses as a representative of Dow on the BBC and promises billions to the victims. Both men possess a friendliness of



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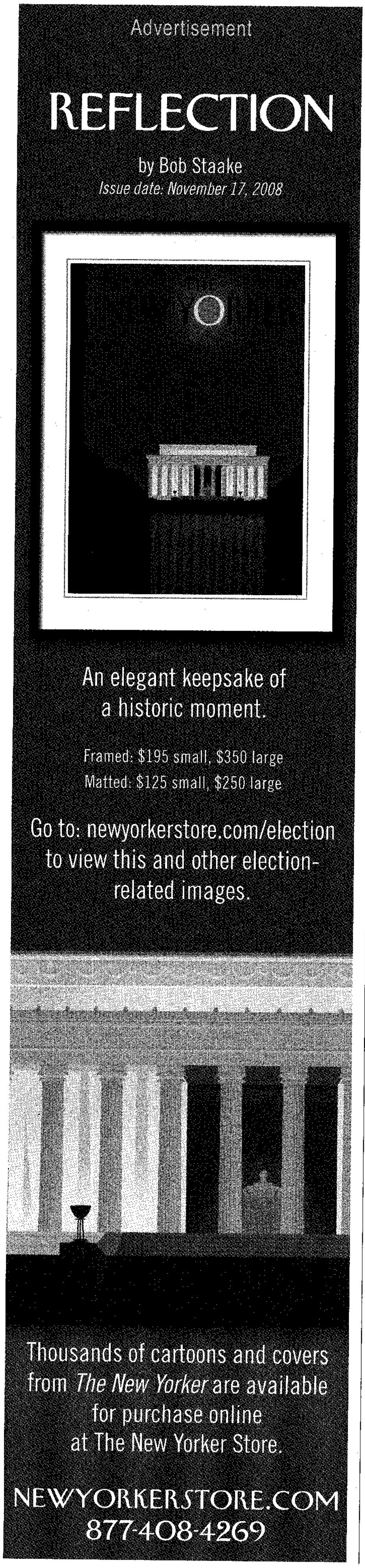
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manner that puts many people at ease and allows their high jinks to take on a note of absurdist fun, but their hoaxes are biting critiques that call out many a greedy corporate executive.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

**ZOMBIELAND**
Woody Harrelson has a rip-roaring time in this comic splatterfest as a redneck from hell who is out to kill zombies. It's the kind of genre acting that doesn't get much notice, but it's a gleeful rampage of a performance. Though the movie owes a lot to its British predecessor, "Shaun of the Dead," it has an American pop edge that cuts through the familiar. This is basically a road movie, about a group of travellers (Jesse Eisenberg, Abigail Breslin, and Emma Stone) who are looking for safe haven after a worldwide plague has turned most of the population into flesh-eating ghouls. As directed by Ruben Fleischer, the action is all rabid mayhem—well played and blessedly disposable. With a memorable cameo by a Hollywood legend that says more about Tinseltown than hundreds of blood-sucking freaks do.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

## *Also Playing*

**AFTERSCHOOL:** In limited release. **MORE THAN A GAME:** In limited release. **WHIP IT:** In wide release.

## REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Undiscovered Countries: The Films of Ulrike Ottinger." All films are in German. Oct. 14 at 6:30: "The Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press" (1984). ♦ Oct. 14 at 9:30: "Freak Orlando" (1981). ♦ In première. Oct. 20 at 7:30: "Making Our Own" (2008, Adrianne Jorge).

**BAM ROSE CINEMAS**
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Oct. 27: "Hungarians in Hollywood." Oct. 14 at 6:50 and 9:30: "Man in the Saddle" (1951, André de Toth). ♦ Oct. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Blow Out" (1981, Brian De Palma). ♦ Oct. 19 at 6:30 and 9:30: "Dracula" (1932, Tod Browning) and "The Mummy" (1931, Karl Freund). ♦ Oct. 20 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Five Graves to Cairo" (1943, Billy Wilder). ♦ "¡Go Uruguay!" All films are in Spanish. Oct. 16 at 7: "Gigante" (2004, Adrián Biniez). ♦ Oct. 17 at 4: "25 Watts" (2001, Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll). ♦ Oct. 17 at 7: "The Dog Pound" (2006, Manuel Nieto Zas). ♦ Oct. 17 at 9:30: "The Pope's Toilet" (2007, César Charlone and Enrique Fernández). ♦ Oct. 18 at 4: "Stranded" (2008, Gonzalo Arijón). ♦ Oct. 18 at 6:50: "Whiskey" (2004, Rebella and Stoll). ♦ Oct. 18 at 9:15: "Kill Them All" (2004, Esteban Schroeder).

**FILM FORUM**
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Oct. 29: The films of Elia Kazan. Oct. 14 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and Oct. 15 at 1 and 3:15: "Baby Doll" (1956). ♦ Oct. 15 at 5:45 and 10: "Gentleman's Agreement" (1947). ♦ Oct. 15 at 8: "Pinky" (1949). ♦ Oct. 16-17 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Splendor in the Grass" (1961). ♦ Oct. 18 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30 and Oct. 19 at 2, 4:30, and 9:30: "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1951). ♦ Oct. 19 at 7: "Viva Zapata!" (1952). ♦ Oct. 20 at 1, 3:30, and 6: "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (1945). ♦ Oct. 20 at 8:30: "Man on a Tightrope" (1953).

**FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Scary Movies." Oct. 14 at 2 and Oct. 15 at 8: "An American Werewolf in London" (1981). The Oct. 15 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Oct. 14 at 9 and Oct. 18 at 2:45: "Creepers," a.k.a "Phenomena" (1985, Dario Argento). ♦ Oct. 15 at 2 and Oct. 16 at 6:30: "Long Weekend" (1978, Colin Eggleston). ♦ Oct. 15 at 4 and Oct. 18 at 5: "The Shout" (1978, Jerzy Skolimowski). ♦ Oct. 15 at 6: "Night of the Living Dead" (1990, Tom Savini). ♦ Oct. 16 at 2 and Oct. 18 at 7: "Who Can Kill a Child?" (1976, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 16 at 4:20 and Oct. 19 at 9:30: "Ravenous" (1999, Antonia Bird). ♦ Oct. 16 at 9: "Dead-Alive" (1992, Peter Jackson). ♦ Oct. 17 at 6: "Horror of Dracula" (1958, Terence Fisher). ♦ Oct. 17 at 7:45: "The Curse of the Werewolf" (1961, Fisher). ♦ Oct. 17 at 9:35: "The Brood" (1979, David Cronenberg). ♦ Oct. 18 at 9:15 and Oct. 19 at 4:30: "The Stepfather" (1987, Joseph Ruben). ♦ Oct. 19 at 2:30: "Candyman" (†). ♦ Oct. 20 at 2 and 9: "The Hitcher" (1986, Robert Harmon), followed by a Q. & A. with the screenwriter Eric Red. ♦ Oct. 20 at 4:30: "The Beast with Five Fingers" (1946, Robert Florey). ♦ Oct. 20 at 6:30: "100 Feet" (2008, Eric Red), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

**FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE**
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Oct. 27: The films of Fabrice Luchini. All films are in French. Oct. 20 at 12:30 and 7:30: "The Tree, the Mayor, and the Médiathèque" (†). ♦ Oct. 20 at 4: "Full Moon in Paris" (1984, Éric Rohmer).

**IFC CENTER**
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Oct. 16-17: "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (1975, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 20 at 8: "Still Bill" (2009, Damani Baker and Alex Vlack), followed by a Q. & A. with the directors.

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Oct. 14-16 at 1:30: "D. W. Griffith at Biograph," including "A Corner in Wheat" (†). ♦ "Spike Jonze: The First 80 Years." Oct. 14 and Oct. 17 at 4:30: "Heavy Metal in Baghdad" (2008, Suroosh Alvi). ♦ Oct. 16 at 4:30: "The Black Stallion" (1979, Carroll Ballard). ♦ Oct. 16 at 8 and Oct. 17 at 2: "Jackass: The Movie" (2002, Jeff Tremaine). ♦ Oct. 18 at 2: Music videos, short films, and commercials, Program 2. ♦ "Contemporasian." Oct. 14-15 at 4, Oct. 16 at 7, Oct. 17 at 7:30, Oct. 18 at 5, and Oct. 19 at 4:30: "Adela" (2008, Adolfo Alix, Jr.). ♦ "Looking at Music: Side 2." Oct. 17 at 8: "Stranger Than Paradise" (1984, Jim Jarmusch). ♦ Oct. 18 at 5:30: "Men in Orbit" (1979, John Lurie), "G Man" (1978, Beth B and Scott B), and "She Had Her Gun All Ready" (1978, Vivienne Dick). ♦ "Gaumont Presents." Oct. 19 at 7: Trichromie Film Program, introduced by Nicolas Seydoux, the chairman of Gaumont.

**RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART**
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Oct. 16 at 9:30: "The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant" (1972, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German).

**SUNSHINE CINEMA**
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Oct. 16-17: "Beetlejuice" (1988, Tim Burton).

## READINGS AND TALKS

**THE STELLA ADLER STUDIO OF ACTING**
The poet Mark Doty reads from his work. (31 W. 27th St., 3rd fl. No tickets necessary. Oct. 15 at 7.)

**SU-MEI YU**
Yu, a noted authority on Thai cooking, discusses the Thai philosophy of using food as medicine, a concept that is addressed in her latest cookbook, "The Elements of Life: A Contemporary Guide to Thai Recipes and Traditions for Healthier Living." (New York Public Library, Mid-Manhattan Library, Fifth Ave. at 40th St. Oct. 19 at 6:30.)

**"THE RED BOOK DIALOGUES"**
In conjunction with the Rubin Museum of Art's exhibition of Carl Jung's legendary notebook (a.k.a. "the holy grail of the unconscious"), the museum is presenting a series of talks pairing a psychoanalyst with a lay participant, including an entrepreneur, a comedian, a nurse, and a building superintendent. The series gets under way on Oct. 19 at 7 with Jane Selinske and the Tibet scholar Robert Thurman. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344.)

**"SAVE THE DELI"**
David Sax celebrates the publication of his book about Jewish delicatessens, "Save the Deli," with food, jokes, music, and a reading. (Ben's Kosher Delicatessen, 209 W. 38th St. For more information, call 212-398-2367. Oct. 19 at 7:30.)

**QUEENS COLLEGE EVENING READINGS**
Robert A. Caro, who published his groundbreaking account of Robert Moses, "The Power Broker," thirty-five years ago, discusses his writing career with Leonard Lopate. (LeFrak Concert Hall, the Music Building, Flushing. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings. Oct. 20 at 7.)

**92ND STREET Y**
Gore Vidal, who recently published an illustrated book about his life, "Snapshots in History's Glare," talks with the writer Jay Parini. Slides will be shown. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 20 at 8.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**IMAGINE SCIENCE FILM FESTIVAL**
This festival, which is in its second year, was founded by Alexis Gambis, who holds a doctorate in genetics and molecular biology and who is currently a film student at New York University. It features movies that have a grounding in credible science. Fifty films, from shorts to features, will be screened, and scientists will be on hand to discuss them. (Oct. 15-24. For more information on screening times and locations, visit www.imaginesciencefilms.com.)

**"POPRALLY"**
Anticipating the release of the film "Where the Wild Things Are," which was directed by Spike Jonze, the museum is hosting a series of screenings celebrating the work of the director. Jonze began his career directing skate videos, and this multifaceted night curated and hosted by Patrick O'Dell, a former *Vice*-magazine photo editor and the author of the skate-scene-oriented "Epicly Later'd" blog, features influential skateboarding videos from the eighties. After the screenings, Jonze will discuss his work. Performing at the after-party in the Garden Lobby is the skateboard-friendly punk-and-hardcore-inspired duo No Age, from Los Angeles. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Oct. 15 at 7:30.)

**THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL**
The tenth annual gathering of prominent artists and contributors to the magazine takes place Oct. 16-18. Many events have sold out, but, as of press time, advance tickets to others are still available. A partial list follows. Oct. 16 at 9:30: A talk between the novelists Jonathan Lethem and Colson Whitehead. (Directors Guild Theatre, 110 W. 57th St.) Oct. 17 at 5: A screening of Jean-Luc Godard's "King Lear," with a discussion by Richard Brody. (Directors Guild Theatre.) Oct. 17 at 7:30: The editor Susan Morrison interviews the singer Loudon Wainwright III. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn.) (For a complete schedule, and information about how to get tickets to all events, visit www.newyorker.com/festival.)

**PROGRESSIVE AUTOMOTIVE X PRIZE SHOWCASE**
Teams in this competition to build a super-efficient vehicle (the prize is ten million dollars, and the target is a hundred miles per gallon) gather with their cars to talk about the technologies behind them and show them off. (Classic Car Club of Manhattan, 250 Hudson St., between Broome and Dominick Sts. Oct. 19 from 2 to 7. For more information, visit www.progressiveautoxprize.org.)

**AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES**
The **International Fine Art and Antique Dealers Show** at the Armory (Oct. 16-22) attempts to banish the economic blahs with lavish booths displaying sumptuous furniture, ornate clocks, silver, rare books, armor, and much else. This year, the fair has slightly increased the number of exhibitors, most of whom come from New York and the U.K., with the odd French and Italian dealer thrown in. The Cotswolds-based Trinity House will offer a portrait of the Ballets Russes star Vera Savina, by Herbert James Gunn; the Brian Haughton gallery, a specialist in English and European ceramics, will exhibit an eighteenth-century tureen, with wonderfully crackled skin, in the shape of a Chelsea melon. (Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-642-8572.) ♦ Opulent furnishings will also go under the gavel at **Sotheby's** sale of English furniture (Oct. 16), which includes several pieces from Hayfield House, a California manse designed in 1919 by Julia Morgan, most famous for her eclectic designs for Hearst Castle. But the highlight of the week should be a single lot at the house's sale of jewels (Oct. 19), a 29.53-carat pear-shaped diamond with a huge estimated value; there seems to be no dearth of bidders for giant gemstones. The sale of watches and clocks on the following day (Oct. 20) includes some delightful automata, such as a whimsical nineteenth-century figure of a lady playing the harp, with fully articulated fingers. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ On Oct. 14, **Christie's** sells off the collection of the late media executive William F. Reilly (which includes tasteful Old Master paintings, antiquities, and a large selection of English furniture), followed by a wine auction on Oct. 15 and by more nineteenth-century furniture, ceramics, and works of art in a sale on Oct. 20. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

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## ON THE HORIZON

### MOVIES
### ITS FAVORITE YEAR
*Oct. 23–Nov. 9*

The New York Film Critics Circle focusses on 1962, when crucial foreign films reached America and Hollywood delivered exotic wonders. The screenings include Jacques Demy's "Lola" and Howard Hawks's "Hatari!" (718-636-4100.)

### THE THEATRE
### STAR-CROSSED
*Oct. 24*

Kenneth Lonergan made a splash in the mid-nineties with his first play, "This Is Our Youth," and his film directorial début, "You Can Count on Me," made him a critical darling. At the Acorn, he directs his drama "The Starry Messenger" for the New Group, starring Matthew Broderick, as an Upper West Side teacher at a planetarium who falls for a single mother, played by Catalina Sandino Moreno ("Maria Full of Grace"). (212-279-4200.)

### NIGHT LIFE
### A GOOD IMPRESSION
*Oct. 28*

The new tribute album, "The Best Is Yet to Come: The Songs of Cy Coleman," features top female vocalists interpreting the works of the great songwriter. Many of these artists, including Patty Griffin, Madeleine Peyroux, Julianna Raye, and Ambrosia Parsley, will perform the material at Town Hall. (800-745-3000.)

### ART
### SHOW AND CELL
*Nov. 1*

"Performa," New York's annual performance-art festival, kicks off this year with a parade in Times Square, dreamed up by the avant-garde musician Arto Lindsay. Revellers will march down Seventh Avenue, playing cell phones as musical instruments. (212-366-5700.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC
### VOX AMERICANA
*Nov. 5*

The Met can survive the occasional strikeout (e.g., the new "Tosca"), but City Opera, in dire straits, needs to hit home runs. Its season begins with a gala performance, "American Voices," that features such favorite singers as Lauren Flanigan, Anna Christy, and Anthony Dean Griffey. (212-721-6500.)

*The cell-phone parade of "Performa."*

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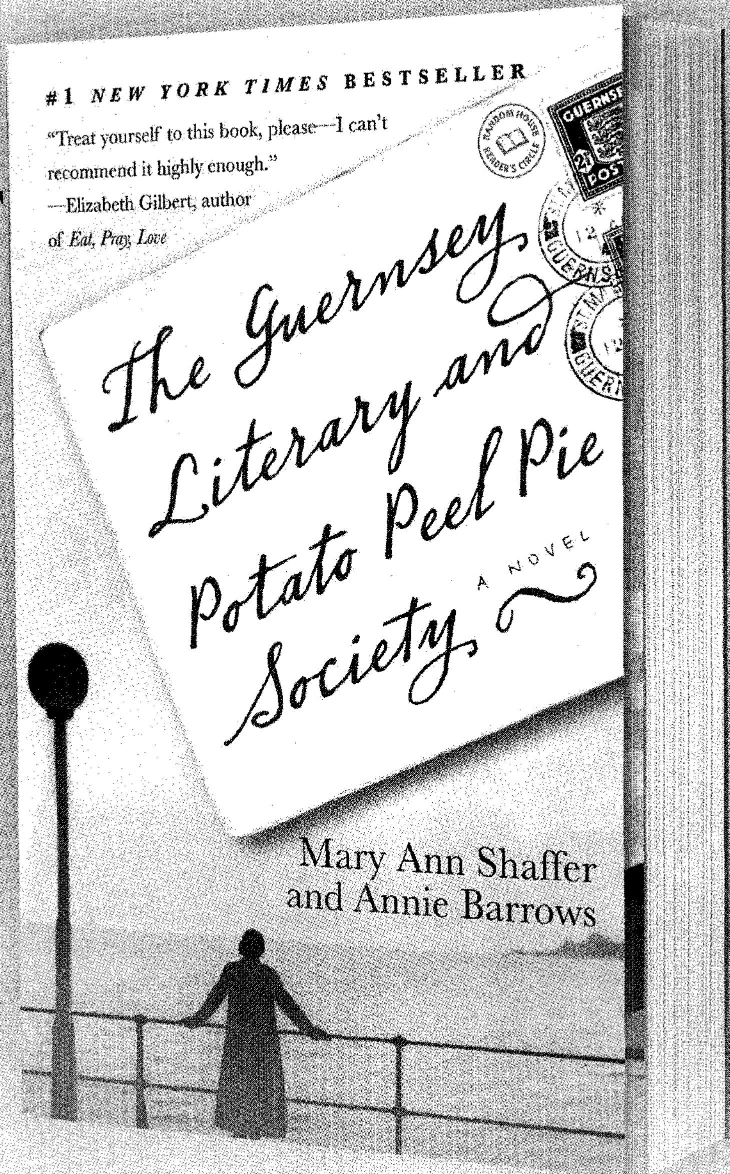
*—Winston Salem Journal*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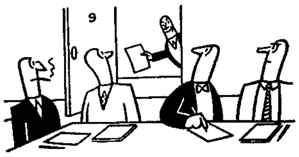
THE
NEW YORKER

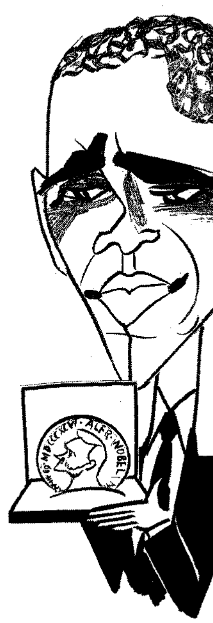
# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## COMMENT
## NOBEL SURPRISE



If President Obama really had to get a gift postmarked Scandinavia this month, he would probably, on the whole, have preferred the Olympics. At least at the Olympics the judges wait till after the race to give you the gold medal. They don't force it on you while you're still waiting for the bus to take you to the stadium. They don't give it to you in anticipation of possible future feats of glory, like a signing bonus or an athletic scholarship. They don't award it as a form of gentle encouragement, like a parent calling "Good job!" to a toddler who's made it to the top rung of the monkey bars. It's not a plastic, made-in-China "participation" trophy handed out to everyone in the class as part of a program to boost self-esteem. It's not a door prize or a goody bag or a bowl of V.I.P. fruit courtesy of the hotel management. It's not a gold star. It's a *gold medal.*

We can take it as a sign of what a lucky fellow our President is that winning the Nobel Peace Prize has been widely counted a bad break for him. Barack Obama has come very far very fast. Five years ago, not long after finishing a distant second for a Chicago congressional nomination, he was still one of the hundred and seventy-seven members of the Illinois state legislature. Four years ago, he took his seat in the United States Senate, ushered there not only by his own undoubted talents but also by the serial self-destruction of his opponents. One year ago, he won the Presidency with a margin of victory—nine and a half million votes—that was the largest since 1984; absent the tailwind provided by his predecessor's abysmal record, however, that margin would have been far smaller, possibly even nonexistent. He is certainly one of fortune's favorites. He came into office on a tide of euphoria. Lately, though, his supporters have been experiencing a vague sense of disappointment. He may have saved the world from a second Great Depression and all that, but the jobless rate keeps on climbing, the planet keeps on heating up, Guantánamo keeps on not getting closed, and roadside bombs keep on exploding. He's had eight whole months, and he still hasn't signed a comprehensive health-care bill. Given that his perceived political problem is exaggerated expectations, does he really need a Nobel Peace Prize before he has actually made any peace?



The award to Obama illustrates, among other things, the difference between the "hard" and the "soft" Nobels. The prizes for physics, chemistry, and medicine are never given for trying, only for succeeding. Also, there is no apparent attempt to achieve regional, national, or ethnic balance. The same cannot be said of the literature prize, which frequently goes to authors who write in languages that few if any of the judges—eighteen grandees of the Swedish Academy—can read. Anyhow, literature is a matter of taste, which is why, among American writers, Pearl S. Buck was deemed worthy of the honor while Henry James was not. (The roster of literary losers, A to Z, also includes Auden, Borges, Conrad, Joyce, Kafka, Nabokov, Proust, Tolstoy, Twain, and Zola.) As for the relatively new economics prize (full name: the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel), it is neither hard nor soft, just kind of mushy—a Golden Globe, not an Oscar.

The peace prize, first given in 1901, has always been the trickiest of the lot. For the first fifty years or so the judges, a five-member committee appointed by the Norwegian parliament, almost always honored a person or an organization devoted to working, in the words of Alfred Nobel's will, "for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduc-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

tion of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses"—a formula that excluded, for example, Mohandas Gandhi. After the Second World War, the judges' definition of peace grew more capacious, producing laureates like Martin Luther King, Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, and the Dalai Lama. But the choice has always been, as a former chairman of the judging committee wrote in 2001, "to put it bluntly, a political act."

The chairman of the Republican National Committee would agree. He quickly fired off a fund-raising e-mail headed "Nobel Peace Prize for Awesomeness," calling the choice proof that "the Democrats and their international leftist allies want America made subservient to the agenda of global redistribution and control." A trifle overwrought? Perhaps. Still, to be fair to the chairman, there's little doubt that for eight years the most prominent figure hovering over the Nobel committee's deliberations was not any of the nominees under consideration; it was George W. Bush. Jimmy Carter richly deserved his belated prize—he is as responsible as were Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin for the thirty years' peace between Israel and Egypt—and Al Gore, who sounded the tocsin on climate change, deserved his. But in neither case did the judges try very hard to hide their satisfaction in delivering a rebuke to Bush. This time their message was one of relief—and of hope and confidence, not just in Obama himself but in a United States that has reëmbraced, as the prize announcement put it, "that international policy and those attitudes for which Obama is now the world's leading spokesman."

A few hours after the news from Oslo, Obama, looking a little abashed, even a little uncomfortable, stepped up to a portable podium in the Rose Garden and spoke of the honor that had come to him so soon—too soon, even many of his admirers admit—and so unexpectedly. "Let me be clear," he said, and went on, first acknowledging the obvious:

> To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who've been honored by this prize—men and women who've inspired me and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace. But I also know that this prize reflects the kind of world that those men and women and all Americans want to build, a world that gives life to the promise of our founding documents. And I know that throughout history the Nobel Peace Prize has not just been used to honor specific achievement; it's also been used as a means to give momentum to a set of causes. And that is why I will accept this award as a call to action, a call for all nations to confront the common challenges of the twenty-first century.

After a few more sombre words, he turned and walked back into the West Wing, there to attend another in a series of meetings on the strategy that he soon must set for the war in Afghanistan. The prize is won, but the peace, as always, is elusive.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

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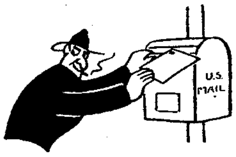
## BRAINTEASER
## YOU'VE GOT MAIL



Moral-reasoning pop quiz: There's a film coming out—a thinly disguised portrayal of a media mogul—and word is that if it's released it will hurt the mogul's reputation. Powerful people intervene: they call a meeting and offer the movie studio money—eight hundred and forty-two thousand dollars—to scrap the movie and destroy the negatives. Would it be wrong for the studio to take the money? "It's an interesting question," James Lindgren, a law professor at Northwestern, said last week. The mogul in question was William Randolph Hearst, and the movie was Orson Welles's "Citizen Kane." The studio turned down the offer, but, Lindgren asked, "had they given in and taken the money, could the studio have been prosecuted for extortion?"

Lindgren was on the topic because of another inflammatory film proposal—the one about the talk-show host who has affairs with female staff members (the one that the CBS producer Robert Joel Halderman allegedly left, last month, with David Letterman's limo driver). Halderman, as everyone knows, is being prosecuted for attempted grand larceny (he has denied wrongdoing), but the act he is accused of committing is blackmail, a crime that, in philosophical and legal circles, presents a conundrum. Lindgren is the author of a paper called "Unraveling the Paradox of Blackmail," which raises the question: why is blackmail considered a crime? The thinking goes like this: It's perfectly legal for Halderman to write, or threaten to write, a screenplay (or an e-mail to TMZ) exposing the fact that David Letterman had flings with "Late Show" employees. It's also legal for Halderman to ask Letterman for money as part of a business transaction. So why are the two things illegal when you put them together? In other words, Lindgren said, "Why is it illegal to threaten to do what you can do legally anyway?"

*David Letterman*

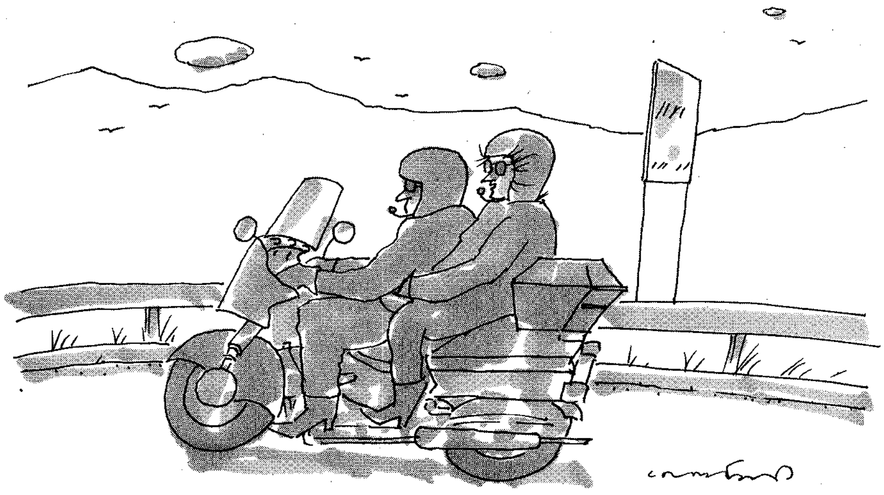
Most theorists agree that blackmail should be illegal; they just can't agree on why. A few days after Letterman's confession, Saul Smilansky, the author of "Ten Moral Paradoxes," said that, in his opinion, what Halderman did wasn't heinous. "It's not terribly attractive, but it's still fairly standard capitalist practice," he said. "The Marxists used to say that capitalism is like blackmail—everyone tries to buy people off. Many social transactions look like blackmail when you examine them." He listed a few: "couples in divorce proceedings basically blackmailing each other to get a better deal," consumers telling a company "if they don't get a settlement they'll go to the press"—in other words, any negotiations based on threats. What makes blackmail different? "There's no good reason to allow it," Smilansky said. "But our attitude towards blackmail, that it's so unusual, so terrible—it's just sanctimonious."

Richard Epstein, the University of Chicago and N.Y.U. law professor, said, "There's this terrible fear of monopoly power. Halderman is sort of a local monopolist." To show that he shouldn't be allowed to "put the squeeze on the guy," Epstein said, "you have to prove that a world where blackmail is illegal is a better place." Epstein is the author of an essay called "Blackmail, Inc.," in which he describes what it would be like if blackmail were legal and were handled by big corporations. In that scenario, Epstein said, Halderman would have hired Blackmail, Inc. "So Blackmail, Inc., goes to Letterman, and they say, 'Look, this is going to really bust your chops if this gets out, but we're going to help you keep it a secret. So the company puts out false public information designed to throw people off the scent." The problem, he said, is that blackmail leads to fraud: "You lie to the world. And lying to the world is wrong."

Other experts addressed the ick factor. "It has something to do with the truth about human psychology," Mitchell Berman, a legal theorist at the University of Texas, said. "There's an anti-commodification norm" (meaning that people aren't O.K. with there being a market for some things; he mentioned prostitution). Lindgren imagined a cash-free, and legal, scenario: "If Halderman had said, 'Stop doing this or I'll expose you,' and Letterman said, 'I don't want to stop doing this,' and Halderman had said, 'I'm forcing you to stop doing this or I'll ruin your reputation'—that would probably not have been blackmail." The Harvard law professor Steven Shavell, who calls himself a "quasi Letterman fan," said the issue lay with Halderman's motives: it's about "hurting the person who committed the crime." He suggested that Halderman's attempt was wrong for the same reasons that vigilante justice is wrong, and he downplayed the idea of a "blackmail paradox," calling such a notion "a toy of philosophically oriented academics."

A final call went out to Walter Block, the libertarian economist. Block believes that blackmail, like smoking, is "yucky" but should be legal. "He only threatened to be a gossip—maybe a screenwriter," he said of Halderman. "Screenwriting and gossiping are legal. If it's legal to do it, it should be legal to threaten to do it." Of Halderman's defense team, he said, "If the purpose is to promote justice, they should argue that it's an unjust law, and he should get off free." Of his fellow ethics experts, he said, "They wouldn't know just law if it bit them in the rear end."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*



*"Pull over at the next bookstore. I could use a toilet and some biscotti."*

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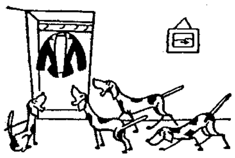
## MAN'S BEST FRIEND
## SCRATCH AND SNIFF



Cell phones smell. You wouldn't think so, but they do. The K-9 Unit of the New Jersey Department of Corrections, while training seven recently acquired cell-phone-sniffing dogs, first put a whole bunch of cell-phone parts in a plastic box to create a kind of sachet of cell-phone scent for use in imprinting. The basic, pervasive cell-phone smell that built up in the closed box was powerful—a sweetish, metallic, ozoney, weird robotic reek. People would never carry such a rank object as a cell phone in their pockets if their noses were as good as a dog's.

To Troy, Ernie, Chance, and the other muscular, well-fed, and extremely enthusiastic dogs who search for illegal cell phones inside New Jersey's thirteen state prisons, the smell of a cell phone is bliss. They love to follow it, love finding its source even more. While held in restraint, just before the search, they emit low, well-disciplined whines of almost unbearable expectation. And when they do find the cell phone—or the cell-phone charger, the earpiece, the battery, or any other related object that somehow picked up cell-phone scent (recently a cell-phone-sniffing dog, though not trained to search for narcotics, found some narcotics that had evidently been stored next to a cell phone)—the dogs react with a panting, whining, scratching happiness greater than any human happiness by a factor similar to that by which a dog's sense of smell is said to be better than ours.

Inside a prison, cell phones defeat some of the purpose of incarceration. They're among the biggest problems prison officials face. Criminals with cell phones continue to run their gangs even while locked up. How do they get the phones? "Oh, gee—all kinds of ways," Thomas Moran, the New Jersey D.O.C. chief of staff, said the other day. "Their friends shoot 'em over the fence with potato guns, fly 'em in on model airplanes, arrows . . . Body cavities, of course, when a girlfriend visits. Packages. Food deliveries. F.C.C. regulations say we can't interfere with cell-phone transmissions by jamming. Going after the illegal phones with dogs is by far the most efficient means."

Recently, the officers of the K-9 Unit

held a demonstration with their cell-phone dogs on the grounds of the Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility, in central Jersey farm country. The officers are so proud of their dogs they beam. As the dogs found cell phones hidden in lockers and near bunks in an unused dorm building, and sniffed out a dog-tooth-marked cell phone in the weeds of a field, the officers explained the program.

Captain Matthew Kyle: "We don't want to publicate what the cell-phone smell is exactly. It's an organic substance that's in all cell phones—leave it at that. The dogs can smell it even when it's masked. They can find it if the cell phone's in water, oil, peanut butter—anywhere."

Sergeant William Crampton: "Only time we ever had a dog indicate inaccurately was on a diabetic test kit one individual had."

Officer Donald Mitchell: "We worked with thirteen dogs to get the seven we have now. Some dogs we had to fail out for environmental reasons. The dog can't work in the prison environment. Maybe a dog don't like the slippery floors in the cellblock, or the noise, or the food odors. Some dogs don't like heights. On the top tier of cells you're looking down through a floor grating four or five stories. There's dogs won't walk on that. Or they don't like the heat up there in the summer."

Officer Joseph Nicholas: "All our dogs right now are German shepherds or Labs. We did try one golden retriever, but we had to fail him out. That dog was too easygoing. He'd come in a room on a search and just lay down. We sent him back to the Seeing Eye dog center in Morristown, where all our cell-phone dogs came from. That golden was a lover, not a fighter."

Captain Kyle: "Very few other states have cell-phone-dog programs like ours—Maryland and Virginia are two of them. There's a private contractor in California that trains dogs for cell-phone work, but they charge twenty-one thousand dollars for three dogs. We trained all our dogs ourselves, saving the taxpayers money. Since we started with our first three dogs, in October of 2008, we've found a hundred and thirty-three cell phones, a hundred and twenty-eight chargers, and I'm not sure how many earpieces, batteries, and other items. We believe that eventually every prison system in the country will be using cell-phone dogs."

*—Ian Frazier*

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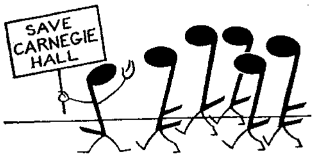
## MOONLIGHTING PRACTICE!



Kevin Smith, the writer-director of such couch-potatoes-rule films as "Clerks" and "Dogma," and the author of a new book called "Shootin' the Sh*t with Kevin Smith," has a sideline in standup. Not long ago, to pretty much everyone's surprise, he played Carnegie Hall. At first, after being introduced by his nine-year-old daughter, Harley, he ambled around the stage in a black bathrobe that made him resemble a giant bumblebee. He seemed overawed, remarking, "I'm not going to call it Carnegie Hall. We're going to pretend it's Stockton College." But within minutes he was back in form and offering candid, digressive responses to his fans' questions—so candid that, in these pages, it's necessary to relay them in code. We're going to substitute "Wayne Gretzky," the hockey great whom Smith reveres, for the intimate body parts that he frequently mentions. When he discusses those body parts' being involved in certain private activities—when he uses them as a verb—the proxy phrase will be "Walter Gretzky," Wayne's father, and, according to Kevin Smith, one of the great human beings.

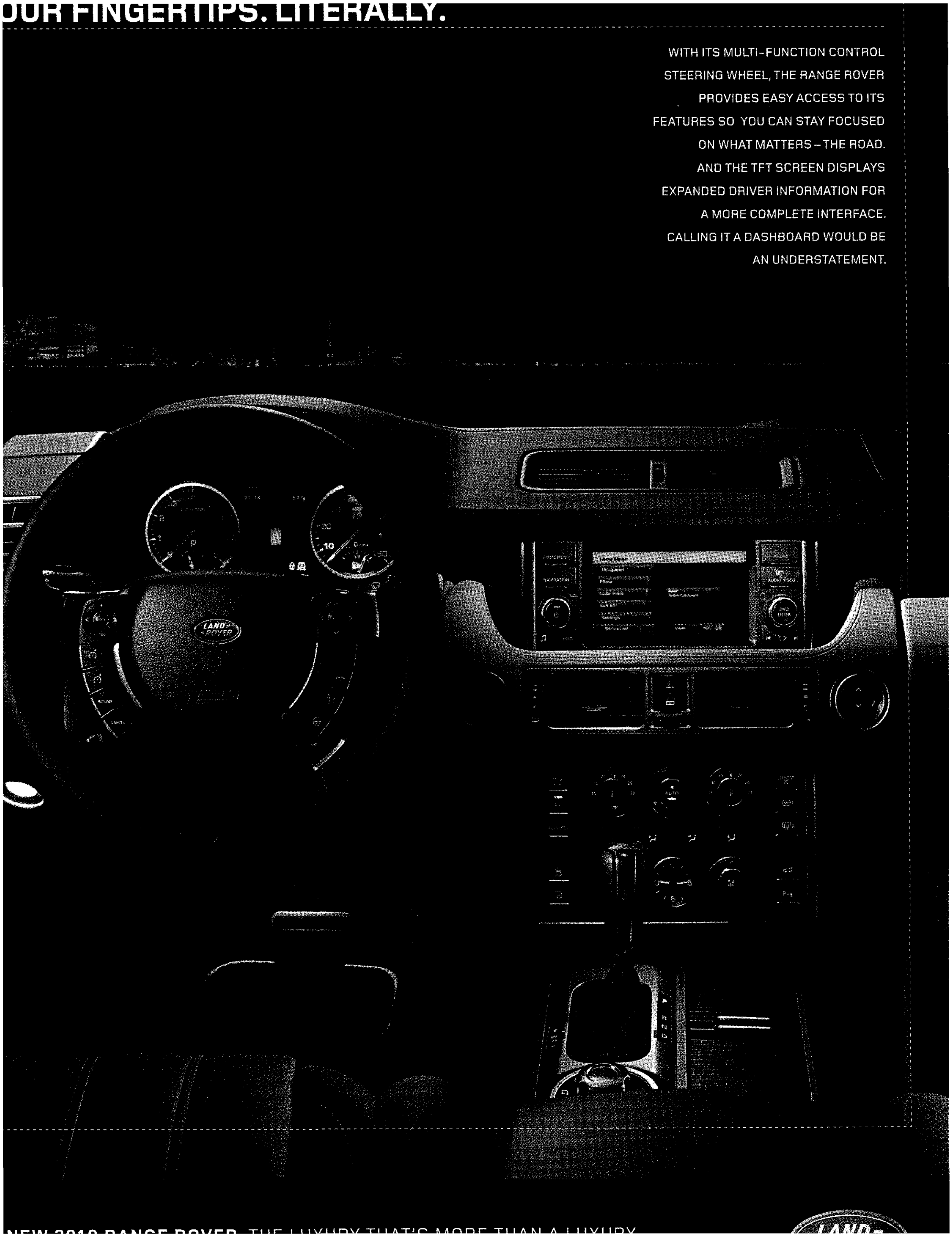
The questions from the floor—about such matters as what use Smith would make of time-travelling ninjas, and his preferred partners for a superhero threesome (Wonder Woman and Batman)—invariably prompted Smith to work both Wayne and Walter Gretzky into his answers. Some questions were about the actual Wayne Gretzky, which could be confusing, so we'll skip ahead to Smith's last interlocutor, who said that it had been great watching the reactions of Smith's mother and his wife, who were seated up front, to Smith's profane musings. Smith pointed proudly at his mother and his wife and said, "There's the Wayne Gretzky I came from, and there's the Wayne Gretzky I go to."

Smith's mother blushed, then shot him two reluctant thumbs up. His wife was less appreciative. After the show, she went backstage to the Maestro Suite, where Smith stood streaming sweat in front of a portable fan, and said, "Please don't ever compare my Wayne Gretzky to your mother's again." After she left, Smith said, "I thought it was kinda circle-of-life, kinda sweet."

He knelt with his elbows on a chair to get a better angle at the fan, and observed that even smoking half a joint late that afternoon hadn't alleviated his performance anxiety. "I'm Catholic, so I spend most of my life feeling unworthy, and being here totally increased that," he said. "They took me out on the stage for the sound check, and I was able to soak it in and say, You know what? It's not that big. It's kind of intimate. I played the San Diego Comic Con, which holds six thousand people. You ever hear six thousand people laugh at a Wayne Gretzky joke you made? You feel like Jesus." Still, Smith said, "everyone else who got to Carnegie Hall gave up their childhood to learn their craft as a cellist so one day they could walk out on that stage. Then I walk out and talk about how fat I am, how little my Wayne Gretzky is, and how I Walter Gretzky.

"You want to be, like, 'I sold out Carnegie Hall,' but . . ." Smith was pacing, trying to preserve the moment as it faded. "I'll remember the Mom's Wayne Gretzky joke, because that was killer. And then the weirdest moment, with my kid before the show. She's been taking piano lessons and trying to play the Beatles' 'If I Fell.' You know, she didn't want to go out there to introduce me—I had to, like, beg her—but then she steps out and nails it! So anyway, I'm sitting here, having already sweated through two shirts, afraid I'm going to finally be found out as a fraud, and all of a sudden I hear *dun-dun-DUN-dun-dun, dun-DAHN*, and she's playing a piano just outside the door, and I thought, That's it, I will take that to my grave." He smiled, sweating still. "I won't remember anything else about tonight, but I will remember my kid trying to plink her way through that Beatles song backstage in the Maestro Suite at Walter Gretzkying Carnegie Hall."

*—Tad Friend*



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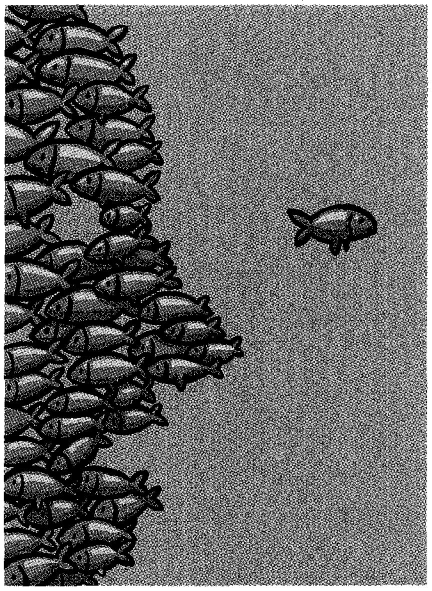
## THE FINANCIAL PAGE
# EXIT THROUGH LOBBY

Resigning in protest is not in the American grain. Robert McNamara stuck around as Secretary of Defense even after he decided that the Vietnam War was a disaster; Colin Powell did the same during the Bush Administration's push for war with Iraq; and in the lead-up to the financial crisis, few high-profile executives stepped down over disagreements in philosophy or tactics. But resigning in protest has gained popularity of late among an unlikely group: big corporations. Last Monday, Apple announced that it would be quitting the U.S. Chamber of Commerce because of the Chamber's opposition to global-warming legislation. And that was just the latest in a series of defections: in the past few weeks, the public-utility companies Pacific Gas & Electric, PNM Resources, and Exelon all announced that they'd be leaving the Chamber, while Nike quit the organization's board of directors. Historically speaking, this is a positive exodus.

The Chamber of Commerce won't be going out of business anytime soon, of course: it still has three million members, mostly small businesses, and a gargantuan lobbying budget. Still, the decidedly public nature of these corporate departures—the companies made statements attacking the Chamber for obstructionism—complicates its claim to be representing the collective interests of American business. One of the great strengths of business lobbies in recent decades has been their ability to maintain a united front. Global warming has revealed fractures in that façade.

It's no surprise that the climate-change debate has become a flashpoint for the Chamber, since it encompasses everything that the organization routinely opposes: regulation, taxation, and a bigger role for government. The Chamber was once considered more moderate than harder-line cousins like the National Association of Manufacturers. But that's changed. Back in 1971, the future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote a famous memo to the Chamber, arguing that the organization needed to become the center of an aggressive defense of the free-enterprise system, which Powell felt was under broad attack. How influential the memo was is still debated, but, over the years, the Chamber became the organization Powell wanted it to be, becoming more ideologically cohesive and playing a key role in blocking consumer-protection legislation, labor-law reform, and financial regulation. Its opposition to regulation now seems reflexive; at the moment, its legislative priorities include opposing a consumer financial-protection agency, opposing a shareholder bill of rights, and opposing "flawed health care proposals," which seems to mean any health-care proposal made by a Democrat. And, while the Chamber does acknowledge that the threat of global warming is real, it has been unbending in its opposition to the current cap-and-trade proposal, and a senior official has called for a "Scopes monkey trial" to debate the science of climate change.



These stands may make most members of the Chamber happy: small business is the backbone of American conservatism, after all. But the hard line on global warming may also reflect dynamics that typically shape group behavior. In any large group, a few people do most of the work—usually those who are most ideologically committed or who have a direct stake in a particular outcome. So decisions often end up reflecting not the wishes of the group as a whole but those of its most engaged members. In the case of climate-change legislation like cap-and-trade, many of the companies on the Chamber's board of directors actually support it. But among the few that publicly oppose it are coal companies, which have a huge stake in stopping any carbon-pricing system. So it's not surprising that the Chamber's general approach is closer to Massey Energy's than to Nike's.

These dynamics are familiar. But major companies' leaving the Chamber rather than accept its policies is new. During the debate over health-care reform in the early nineties, for instance, the Chamber ended up coming out against the Clinton health plan without losing the support of companies like Ford—even though reform would have benefitted automakers, hobbled as they are by health-care costs. The recent resignations, and public dissent from companies that are still members, like Johnson & Johnson and G.E., suggest that, when it comes to global warming, companies are unwilling to sit quietly by.

Why the difference? Partly, it may be a matter of self-interest; Exelon, for instance, has big investments in renewable energy. But it may reflect a calculation that global warming is simply too big an issue to get wrong, both economically—few companies are really going to benefit from the melting of the polar ice caps—and from a public-relations point of view. It's also probably no coincidence that these resignations have come at a time when the Chamber's anti-regulatory zeal looks not just outmoded but self-defeating. Had the Chamber supported tougher regulation of financial and housing markets, after all, the myriad small businesses it represents would undoubtedly be better off today. And it's far from clear that across-the-board hostility to regulation is really in the best interests of the free-enterprise system. We assume that lobbies always recognize what's best for their members. But they don't, and, in the case of climate change, they may very well be missing what the companies that have resigned in protest have seen: global warming isn't just bad for the planet; it's bad for business.

—*James Surowiecki*

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## ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

# THE IMPERFECTIONIST

*Urs Fischer's inspired sloppiness.*

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Freshly showered, Urs Fischer mopped his forehead, face, and neck with a paper towel. It was a muggy morning in July, and Fischer, the thirty-six-year-old Swiss artist, was feeling the heat. His frayed blue cotton shirt was stretched tight over an ample torso; through gaps and tears in the fabric, I caught glimpses of extensive virtuoso tattoos (floral, abstract, and figurative); more tattoos were in view on his beefy bare arms. We were having coffee and croissants in the front room of a loft apartment on Bond Street, where Fischer lives with his American girlfriend Cassandra MacLeod and their three cats. Any day now, they were expecting their first baby. Fischer was also getting ready for his first New York museum show, which will open on October 28th, at the New Museum of Contemporary Art.

With patient good humor and a lopsided smile—his mouth turning up on the right side only—he addressed a question I had asked him about art's ability to have a life of its own, apart from what the artist may have had in mind. "I think art works best in people's memories," he said. "For me, it's not just the act of going to see it on the wall. I'm not saying it's bad to do that, although very often it can be disappointing, you know? But in the memory, with all the things you've heard about it, all the stories, art becomes this great, rich, flexible thing."

Fischer's own art, like Fischer himself, is highly memorable but hard to pin down. It consists, for the most part, of three-dimensional objects made from materials not usually associated with art. Fischer's "Bread House" (2004-05) is just what the title says: a life-size one-room alpine chalet whose walls and roof are made from bread loaves in various sizes and shapes. I saw it in 2007, in an exhibition at the Deste Foundation, in Athens, and it has made frequent appearances on my memory screen ever since. In the Athens version (there have been two others), the chalet's floor was covered with Oriental rugs, which muffled the crunching of fallen bread crumbs underfoot. I've read that there were live parakeets hopping around other installations of this piece, in Rotterdam and at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, in New York. There were no parakeets in Athens, to my recollection, but when I think of the piece now I usually see them, decoratively pecking at crumbs.

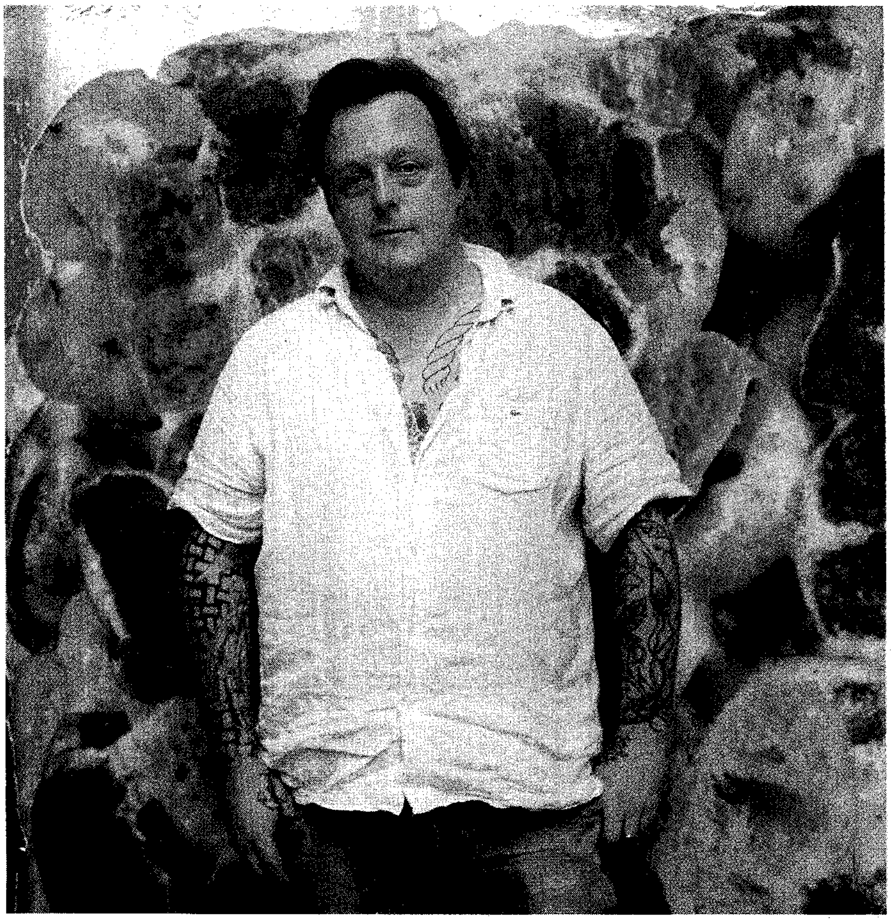
The Deste Foundation is owned by Dakis Joannou, a sixty-nine-year-old Greek construction and hotel magnate who is one of the world's leading collectors of contemporary art. Also featured in the Deste exhibition, along with works by Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, Chris Ofili, and other art-market headliners, was Fischer's "What If the Phone Rings?" (2003), another hard-to-forget piece involving three lifelike, hand-colored wax sculptures of nude women in traditional poses: seated, supine, and prone. Each figure had wicks implanted in one or more parts of her anatomy. The wicks were lit at the start of the exhibition, and the progressive melting, with its resulting cavities, disfigurations, and dripping or puddling wax, would continue until the end of the show, after which Joannou would have the figures recast and repainted. The process costs twenty-five thousand dollars, I am told, and Joannou considers this money well spent.

Since Fischer first began showing his work, in the mid-nineteen-nineties, in Europe, he has produced an enormous number of objects, drawings, collages, and room-size installations. "I love working," he told Massimiliano Gioni, the young Italian-born curator of his upcoming show at the New Museum. "I don't know what to look for in my work but I consider it a good friend of mine."

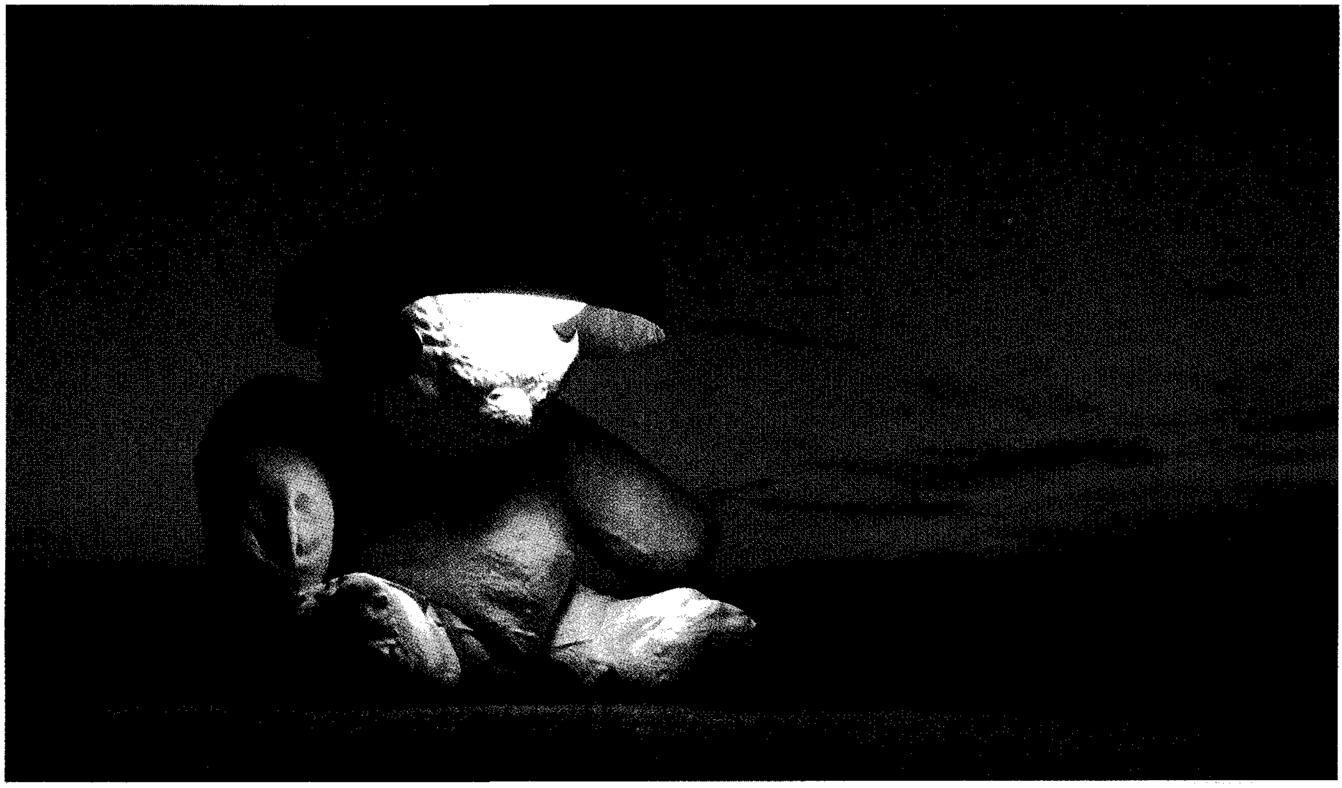
His pieces range in size and scale from an ordinary apple and pear—both real, halved, decaying, and joined together by a large screw—to a twenty-three-foot-high cast-bronze teddy bear sitting under a desk lamp, and a thirty-foot-high metal tree whose leaves are laser prints of more than two thousand of Fischer's vivid, slapdash drawings. He has made collage paintings out of dust bunnies, and indoor rain showers of suspended egg-size acrylic raindrops. The raindrop piece is called "Horses Dream of Horses." His titles can be as quixotic as his materials. One of my favorites is "Change of Taste for Miss Cocktail," a cast-nickel silver rat wielding, with its tail, a large hammer that's about to bash its silly head in. Many of Fischer's earlier works are reproduced in the catalogue for the New Museum exhibition, but the show itself, which will fill all three of the museum's exhibition floors, contains only work finished within the past two years; quite a lot of it was still being fabricated over the summer, and this was causing problems. "Urs made a lot of changes in the plans," Gioni confided to me, about two months before the opening. "I've worked with him before, and I know this happens—it's part of the Urs mythology to push things to the very end. Today, I went to his studio and learned that a piece that was supposed to be a bed is now going to be a horse. One of the five huge cast-aluminum sculptures that are being made in China is behind schedule, so we can't ship it by boat. Sending it by air is going to cost forty thousand dollars. I'm not surprised, but I'm pissed off. Urs's commitment to the work is beyond any reasonable level. Of course, all great artists think that way."

Is Fischer a great artist? Not yet, maybe, but you can't be around him without noticing an abundance of certain qualities—self-confidence, energy, ambition, and the ability to drive curators bonkers, to name four—that could make him a contender. The cast-aluminum pieces that Gioni mentioned have been in the works since 2005, when Fischer began squeezing, pounding, and poking lumps of clay into more or less accidental bloblike forms. "I make them fast, not thinking about composition, and select a few," he said. "It's very raw." With help from Scipio Schneider, a graphic designer whom he met when they were both sixteen-year-old schoolboys in Zurich, he found out how to scan the three-dimensional clay forms into a computer so that they could be reproduced in large scale, and then persuaded other well-wishers to fund the complex and expensive process of casting the blown-up versions in aluminum. (The casting was done in China, to save money.) Some of these have been shown privately in Europe. The five new pieces that were being cast for the New Museum ranged from ten feet to eighteen feet high. Fischer showed me a booklet that he and Schneider recently published, with Photoshop images of the forms, in much larger scale, in simulated urban settings. Dull gray in color, the sculptures were monstrous and menacing but, at the same time, strangely human, and, in certain settings, very funny. One of them, which had materialized by a river in Shanghai, towered above a group of high-rise office buildings. Another blocked an intersection in downtown Houston. Fischer's original idea was to make the forms that big, or bigger. The American collector Peter Brandt bought a thirty-five-foot-high variant, which will be installed next year on his property in Connecticut. Art probably can't compete with the real world, Fischer concedes, but why not try?

Fischer is not a conceptual artist. Although his work generates ideas, it never starts with them; it starts with the materials he uses, and the way he shapes them. At first, he made everything himself, by hand, wherever he happened to be working at the time. Dozens of skilled people in Zurich and Shanghai were building and assembling the elements of his New Museum show. Fischer is comfortable with this; he supervises the process so closely that his presence—large, provocative, and omnivorous—is ingrained in the result. Francesco Bonami, an independent curator who has worked with Fischer on several group shows in Europe (he will also curate next year's Whitney Biennial), calls him "a perfectionist in imperfection." Fischer greatly admires Jeff Koons, but his own work is the antithesis of Koons's; high-tech precision does not interest him. "Urs's sloppiness is absolutely perfect sloppiness,"


*Fischer says he is "interested in collisions of things." Photograph by Steve Pyke.*

Bonami told me. "It's almost the platonic ideal of sloppiness. That's the interesting part."



*"Untitled (Lamp/Bear)" (2005-06). Fischer's gift is for transforming materials. "He's not an artist with a message," an associate says.*

COURTESY URS FISCHER/GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE

The notion of being an artist didn't occur to Fischer when he was growing up. He was born in Zurich in 1973. Both of his parents were (and still are) doctors. Urs was their second child—his older sister, Andrea, is now a journalist in Zurich, with two children of her own. "I found out recently that my parents were worried about me, because I seemed lazy, and they're really happy now because I'm doing something," Fischer said. "I was never interested in school, and I didn't like to do homework." At sixteen, he enrolled in the Schule für Gestaltung in Zurich, a general arts-and-crafts academy for students who were not on the university track. That's where he met Scipio Schneider, who already knew that he wanted to be a graphic designer. Fischer's main interest then was photography. "If somebody we knew said he was going to be an artist," Schneider recalled, "you thought, What a loser." Fischer, who had a studio for his photographic work, remembers vowing that he would not spend his life in studios. After the basic, first-year course in art and design, he enrolled in the school's photography department, and supported himself by working as a bouncer at Zurich night clubs and house parties. What was that like? I asked him. Did he intimidate people? "I don't think so, no. How can I describe this? You learn you can talk with people. You can have problems with people, but you can also talk with them." In Switzerland, most people are so well behaved that bouncers don't do much bouncing, but Fischer's physical presence was, according to Schneider and others, an effective deterrent.

After he'd spent two years in the photography department, Fischer said, "they wanted me to take some tests, to write stuff, and I didn't see why I had to do this." He quit school, went to visit friends in Amsterdam, and moved there in 1993, when he was nineteen. Amsterdam, unlike Zurich, was a lively center of contemporary art and artists. Fischer learned English there (he grew up speaking German), and got a grant to study at a professional art school run by Dutch artists. He also acquired a Bavarian girlfriend who was involved in filmmaking, and through her he began building and eventually designing film sets. (Fischer's father, who rebuilt their hundred-and-sixty-year-old house in his spare time, had taught him a lot about Swiss carpentry and craftsmanship.) Most of the work he did in art school died a natural death, but a few things survived: a small wooden relief sculpture that offers a view into a fist—a partly clenched fist, open just enough on one side that you can look in and see the curled fingers—and three cheap, mass-produced chairs, altered sculpturally to suggest the positions people assumed in using them. It was a preview of two subjects—holes and chairs—that would appear many times in his future work.

A shift in attitude marked the advanced European art of the nineteen-nineties. Rejecting the subjectivity of the neo-expressionist generation and the market-savvy iconoclasm of American and British post-Pop, Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen, Franz West, and other Europeans went in for eccentric, mostly figurative paintings and sculptures that invoked an aesthetic of messiness, cynicism, and decay. Echoes of this approach, but with more humor and less cynicism, infuse Fischer's earliest work: the screwed-together apple and pear, two chairs that appear to be copulating, a collapsing cinder-block wall built on a bed of rotting fruits and vegetables. The wall figured, along with a group of drawings, in his first solo show, in 1996, at a gallery in Zurich. Eva Presenhuber, the gallery's director at the time, had wanted to put him in a group show first, but he refused. He didn't like the other work she was showing, and, he told me, "I was very suspicious about showing in a gallery." He was making good money building sets, and was not at all sure that he wanted to be an artist. "His work was very strange," Presenhuber said. "Hand-made sculpture, at a time when art was mostly conceptual, or appropriation—it looked like something I knew, but I didn't know it in that way." She offered Fischer a one-man show, and after some hesitation he agreed. He showed there again a year later, and when Presenhuber became a partner at a larger gallery in Zurich, in 1998, Fischer was one of her main artists. He got married that year, to his first and only Swiss girlfriend, and moved to London. The marriage ended, amicably, five years later, he said, "because we were always in different cities. I like to be with someone."

Fischer's current studio occupies a large warehouse in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, near the waterfront. I went over there with him one morning in late July, in his personalized BMW. Rock-band and travel stickers adorned the dashboard and the fenders; a big sticker on the rear bumper read "I ♥ Kippenberger." Darren Bader, the only American on Fischer's team of studio assistants, drove the car. Fischer likes fast cars and has owned a few, but he doesn't drive. "I don't know why not," he said. "I think I would be a good driver." He wore shorts and a dark shirt with white pinstripes. Running down one leg was a tattoo that read either "NEVER" or "FOREVER"—I wasn't sure which.

The floor space in the studio, a hundred and eighty feet long by fifty feet wide, was occupied largely by cardboard models of the "mirror boxes" that would fill one of the three floors in the New Museum exhibition. There were more than thirty of them, ranging in height from two or three feet to eight feet (the same proportions as the finished boxes), and each one bore a single photographed image of something familiar: the Empire State Building, a raw T-bone steak, a London telephone booth, a cupcake, a sneaker, half a pear (greatly enlarged), a book, Teddy Roosevelt's face (from Mt. Rushmore) on a cigarette lighter, a music stand, Froot Loops, a hanging chain. "This was something I started three, four years ago," Fischer explained. There would be fifty-two boxes in all. The real ones, which were being fabricated to Fischer's specifications at a workshop in Zurich, are made of metal, with a thin outer layer of polished stainless steel (not mirror glass), on which the silk-screened images appear to float in space. "I don't want the body of the thing," Fischer told me. "I just want the image."

Getting this effect had been complicated and costly. Each image is a composite of many photographs, taken by a professional photographer in New York and minutely adjusted by computer to give an impression of volume on a flat surface. It would not have been possible to do this with the larger objects, like the Empire State Building, so Fischer used replicas—a tourist-shop model of the Empire State, a piggy-bank London telephone booth (with a coin slot on top). The complexities of the process eluded me, and Fischer didn't feel like explaining it further. As soon as the cardboard models were all there, in about two weeks, he and his colleagues would begin moving them around, trying various combinations, to determine how the real ones would be installed at the museum when they arrived, in early October. I asked Fischer how he had decided on these particular images. "It's kind of arbitrary," he said. "It's not about our culture now. It's just objects I choose. I like that they are not very interesting things—or they are. It depends on your level of attention. And I don't care about big or small. I'm interested in collisions of things, and how objects relate to each other."

Since he moved into the Brooklyn studio, earlier this year, Fischer has spent a fair amount of money on it, putting in skylights and a combination kitchen and office space, up a flight of wide stairs from the ground-floor studio. He took me upstairs and introduced me to other members of his team: Scipio Schneider, on leave from his Zurich design office to coördinate the mirror-box project; Dominique Clausen, another longtime friend, who was overseeing the Photoshop work on the boxes; and Mia Mar-

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furt, a computer whiz. Except for Darren Bader, our designated driver that morning, all of them are Swiss. So is Carmen D'Apollonio, who was out of town; a fashion designer who has her own clothing line in Zurich, D'Apollonio has been Fischer's invaluable associate since 2000. "Carmen doesn't like art," Fischer told me. "She thinks it's unnecessary, but she can relate to it, and you cannot manipulate her opinion. She will not lie. I kind of trust her as a first audience—the galleries I wouldn't trust."

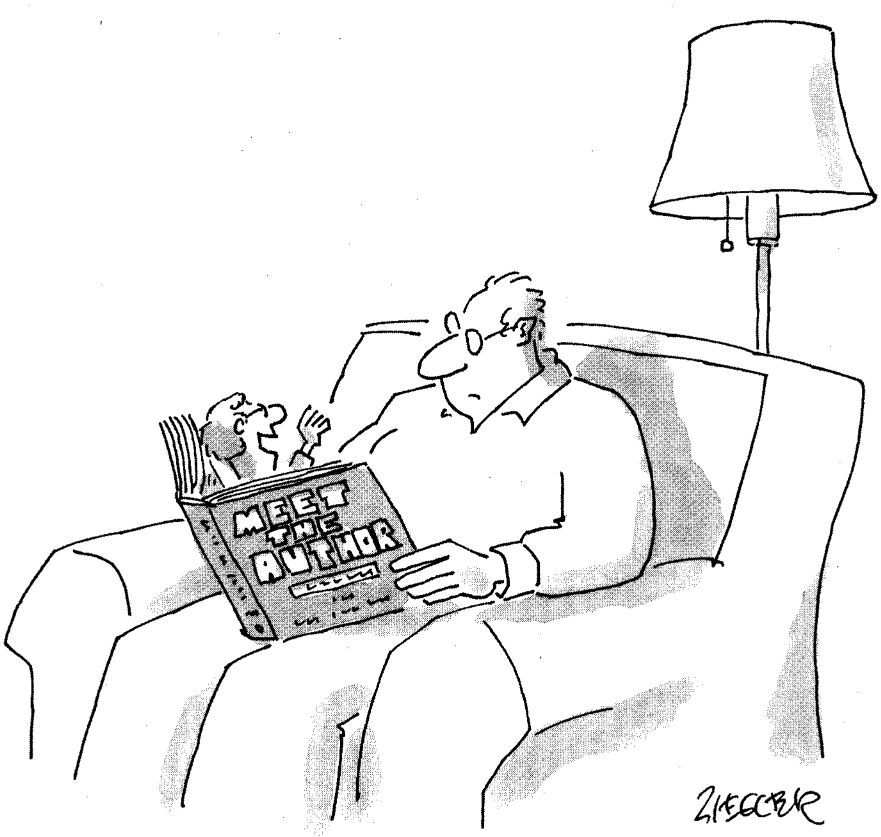
A long table near the kitchen was set for lunch: three loaves of French bread, various cheeses, deli meats, spreads, olives, pickles, a few bottles of San Pellegrino water, but no wine or beer. (Fischer likes to drink, but not when he's working.) The kitchen equipment was high-end; the counters were onyx, as befits an artist whose current work sells for upward of half a million dollars on the primary market. "If you spend so much time in a place, you want to be happy in it," Fischer said, smiling his half smile. Lunch was convivial, at times boisterous. Schneider cut the bread and tossed hunks of it to the rest of us. There were jokes about the withered herbs in the planters—someone had sprayed them with denatured alcohol instead of water, by mistake. Fischer presided over the table without effort, a benevolent godfather.

Fischer has travelled a lot, and lived in several cities—Amsterdam, London, Los Angeles, Berlin. Something about the mirror-box models downstairs made me think they might relate to New York, where he has been based since 2006. He said, "I love the Manhattan skyline. I see it every day, coming back from Brooklyn. Nobody could invent that—it's the sum of so many things. It's not Paris by Haussmann. There is one building I look at when I cross the Manhattan Bridge. A huge building, much taller than anything around it, that's probably from 1890 or something. And the façade of that building ended up on a very narrow street! I like the uncontrollable—that's what makes it so lively here. But the show is not about Manhattan."

Fischer's work got noticed very quickly in Europe, for reasons that are not immediately clear. The early pieces were rough and frequently ugly—shoddy, throwaway objects slapped together—but there was a kind of magic to the way he transformed his material. "His things didn't have a contemporary look," Gioni said. "They looked primitive. He's playing with very deep archetypes—the fairy-tale house, the tree that every child climbs—but he's not telling you what to think about them. He's not an artist with a message." Mick Flick, an adventurous German collector whose grandfather supplied the Wehrmacht with weapons (and went to jail for war crimes), bought a lot of Fischer's early work. By 2003, he was showing with Sadie Coles, in London, and Gavin Brown, in New York. For his 2003 show at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, he sawed a big hole into one of the gallery's walls and stood the cutout against an adjoining wall. A year later, he had a major exhibition at the Kunsthaus, Zurich. It included a lot of early work, in many different materials—painted styrofoam or polyurethane heads and body parts, glass and mirror labyrinths, a broom seemingly held up by a balloon, skeletons in peculiar situations—and some of the more recent set pieces, including "Horses Dream of Horses" and "What If the Phone Rings?" Now and then, his constructions and deconstructions echoed work by other artists—Gordon Matta-Clark had cut cross-sectional pieces from houses in the nineteen-seventies; Bruce Nauman and others have used wax heads and cast body parts—but Fischer's work was not derivative. He used whatever he felt like using, and gave it a life of its own.

A number of important European collectors and museums got on board after the Kunsthaus show, but until recently his work was little known outside Europe. This may be one of the reasons that Fischer moved from Berlin to New York. "Some artists are confident and clueless," Gavin Brown told me, "but Urs is not clueless." Fischer's entry caused a stir at the 2006 Whitney Museum Biennial—two enormous holes in two gallery walls, providing a long view of a painting by Fischer's close friend Rudolf Stingel, an Italian artist with whom he had shared studios in Berlin and New York. For his 2007 show at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, he excavated the gallery's main room, bringing in contractors to dig an eight-foot hole where the floor had been, and calling the result "You." Intrepid visitors climbed down into the pit; others peered nervously from above. The *New York* critic Jerry Saltz called it "one of the most splendid things to have happened in a New York gallery in a while." Brown, who is closer in spirit to his artists than most dealers are, takes pride in knowing that "You" could have been done only in a commercial gallery, "where the landlord didn't know what we were doing, and where by the skin of our teeth we could get away with it." (Chris Burden had done something similar—and much larger—in 1986, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, with a piece called "Exposing the Foundation of a Museum.") "You" has been sold, and the piece will be re-created, under Fischer's supervision, by a private foundation in the New York area.

A lot is riding on the New Museum show, both for Fischer and for the museum. Since its reopening, in 2007, in a new building on the Bowery, this thirty-year-old institution has sought to play a more central role in the presentation of cutting-edge art. Its young and adventurous curators have been doing the kind of exploratory theme shows that MOMA and the Whitney rarely attempt, for a growing audience that seems avid for membership in the downtown art scene. "I'm very curious to see what Urs is going to do there," Rudi Stingel said the other day. "The New Museum has always been something like Off Broadway, but Urs is not 'off.' Maybe he can turn this around."



Lotti MacLeod, Urs and Cassandra's baby, was born on July 25th. She was awake when I visited the Bond Street loft a couple of weeks later, calm and lovely in her cushioned carry-cot. One of the three cats paused occasionally to study her. Both parents radiated parenthood. (Cassandra is an artist herself; three of her small, rather haunting paintings of familiar objects—cats, food—hung on the wall.) The doorbell rang, and a delivery boy came in with a present for Lotti, in a long box from Bonpoint; one of the cats promptly jumped on the table and knocked it off. Fischer said the New Museum show was coming together slowly. When I asked about the new piece, the horse, he said, "No more horse. It doesn't work, it became a joke—too funny." In its place, he had decided to use two freestanding crutches, the kind that fit on the forearms, which would be cast in aluminum. "It's kind of the same as the horse, because it's very leggy," he said. "The crutches will communicate with each other."

Fischer was going to Zurich the following week, for a few days, to check on the mirror boxes, and after that he was off to China to see how the last of the big cast-aluminum sculptures—the one that should have been finished long ago—was coming along. I asked him whether these sculptures had names. "They have pseudonyms," he said. "The pseudonyms that Mallarmé used in his fashion magazine." He couldn't remember them at the moment, but he e-mailed four of them to me: "Ix," "Miss Satin," "Marguerite de Ponty," and "Zizi." (The tallest, still unfinished sculpture had not yet been named.) "I wanted names for them, but I thought it was nicer to have a name that's a pseudonym. Otherwise, if you give a name to a sculpture, it's really the name." Fischer is a great reader, I knew, but I had heard that he read mostly about art and artists. Had he also read Mallarmé? "No," he said. "Well, I do, a bit. But no."

Three weeks before the show opened, I learned that the official title was "Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty." The mirror boxes hadn't yet arrived from Zurich, but were expected soon—all by air freight. Fischer was insisting that Gioni have the third-floor gallery's ceiling lowered, at enormous expense; when that was accomplished, he planned to paper the walls with photographic replicas of the way they looked after the last show was taken down, scars and all (don't ask), as a backdrop for some large collage paintings that he was working on in his studio. "Urs doesn't think it will work, philosophically, unless he does this," Gioni said. "I told him that philosophy shouldn't cost that much. In this last month I have thought a couple of times of killing him."

Reached by telephone, Fischer said everything was fine. The ceiling of the third-floor gallery was being lowered. He had signed off on the catalogue, which had been giving them all nightmares, and he was sure the new pieces would get finished in time for the opening. "I'm not worried," he said. "Now it's playtime." ♦

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BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

*From the Web site of the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer.*

Senate Minority Leader John Land, also frequently at odds with Sanford, doubts the governor can change or knows how to compromise.

"If he didn't get his way, he'd take his balls and go home, so he left a lot of things on the table," the Manning Democrat said.

## SHOUTS & MURMURS

# SUBJECT: OUR MARKETING PLAN

BY ELLIS WEINER

Hi, Ellis—

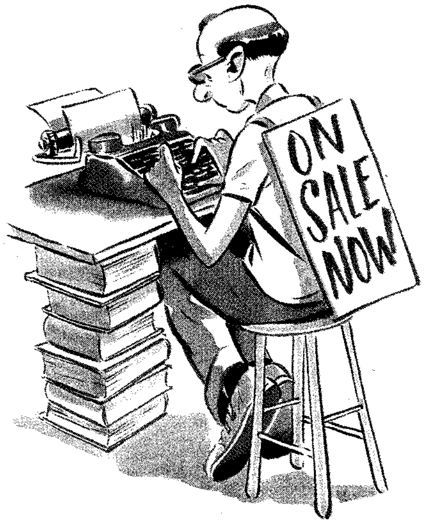
Let me introduce myself. My name is Gineen Klein, and I've been brought on as an intern to replace the promotion department here at Propensity Books. First, let me say that I absolutely love "Clancy the Doofus Beagle: A Love Story" and have some excellent ideas for promotion.

To start: Do you blog? If not, get in touch with Kris and Christopher from our online department, although at this point I think only Christopher is left. I'll be out of the office from tomorrow until Monday, but when I get back I'll ask him if he spoke to you. We use CopyBuoy via Hoster Broaster, because it streams really easily into a Plaxo/LinkedIn yak-fest meld. When you register, click "Endless," and under "Contacts" just list everyone you've ever met. It would be great if you could post at least six hundred words every day until further notice.

If you already have a blog, make sure you spray-feed your URL in niblets open-face to the skein. We like Reddit bites (they're better than Delicious), because they max out the wiki snarls of RSS feeds, which means less jamming at the Google scaffold. Then just Digg your uploads in a viral spiral to your social networks via an FB/MS interlink torrent. You may have gotten the blast e-mail from Jason Zepp, your acquiring editor, saying that people who do this sort of thing will go to Hell, but just ignore it.

The vi-spi is cross-platform, but don't worry if you think you're not on Facebook, because you actually are. Jason enrolled you when you signed the contract last year, or at least he was supposed to, and he told Sarah Williams he did before he had to retire and Sarah left for nursing school. You currently have 421 Friends, 17 Pending Requests, 8 Pokes, 5 Winks, and 3 Proposals of "Marriage."

I've attached a list of celebrities we think would be great to blurb your book, so find out their numbers and call them up. Be sure to do all this by Monday, because Sales Conference starts Tuesday. We come back Friday and then immediately on Saturday (!) all of editorial (Janet, plus probably Michelle, her assistant) and I go to the Frankfurt Book Fair for a week. During that time the office will be closed, although to help cover the costs of the Germany trip it will actually be sublet to the John Lindsay Elementary School P.T.A. as a rehearsal space for this year's fund-raiser production of "The Music Man." I'm told that this was one of the things that Jason didn't understand and which contributed to his "condition."



Once we get back from Frankfurt, we'd like to see you on morning talk shows like the "Today" show and "The View," so please get yourself booked on them and keep us "in the loop." If I'm not here—which I won't be, since after the book fair I go on vacation for two weeks—just tell Jenni, my assistant, when she gets back from jury duty.

Remember in your blog to tab-skim your readers' comments. You can use Twitter, Chitt-chaTT, or Nit-Pickr. When you reply to comments, try to post at least one photo per hour of you doing everyday tasks around the house, such as answering comments and posting photos. Please make sure they're pre-scorched. Let me know, when I get back from Retreat a week after my vacation, if self-surging is a problem.

As re: personal appearances, to cut down on travel expenses we're trying something new this season called RAP, or Readings by Author by Proxy. We're asking authors in certain key areas of the country to stay "close to home" and give readings at local bookstores of both their own books and a few of our other new releases. We can send you a list of bookstores in your area once you fill out the My Local Bookstores list on your Author's Questionnaire. You'll be reading not only from your book but from "Code Blue Stat," a new medical thriller we're really excited about, and "Fifty Great Pan Sauces," a cool new cookbook. Their authors, Dr. Steven Rosenthal and Gail Freenye, will stay in Chicago and Boston, respectively, and read from each other's book and yours. This idea, apparently, is what made Jason take his clothes off and lock himself in a supply closet.

F.Y.I., we've migrated all the photos out of your book and onto the Web page. It makes the hard-copy version cheaper to produce (fewer pages; no photos) and the e-text more "Kindle-friendly." Sometime next week, call Christopher over an ISDN line and say your name, as distinctly as possible, at least two hundred times, so we can dub it as an AudioAutograph onto the podcast edition. (You may already have done this for a previous book, but somehow Jason managed to delete all the audio files before Security escorted him from the building.)

Don't hesitate to try to contact me if you have any questions. I sort of have my hands full, promoting twenty-three new releases this fall, but I'm really excited about working on your book, and I look forward to collaborating with you to make "A History of Moorish Architecture, 1200-1492" the biggest success it can be.

Best regards,
Gineen Klein

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PROFILES

# THE SECRET KEEPER

*Jules Kroll and the world of corporate intelligence.*

### BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

When Jules Kroll was a kid, in Bayside, Queens, his father had a printing business—“a miserable little company,” according to Kroll. It was the nineteen-fifties, and what Kroll mainly remembers from watching his old man go over the books at the kitchen table on Sundays are the humiliations that his father suffered at the hands of purchasing agents, many of whom required “gifts”—kickbacks—before they would give him work. “It was pretty dispiriting,” he says. “It made me pretty angry.” Later, when his father fell ill, Kroll, by then a young Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan, had to come home and run the business. A three-month leave of absence turned into three claustrophobic years. But the experience gave Kroll an idea. He made the rounds of companies that had a lot of printing done. He could save them money, he said. He knew where the graft was in their printing jobs—the bribes and the waste and overpayments. He wasn’t asking for a fee, just a percentage of whatever he saved them. The parent company of Marvel Comics was the first to agree, and Kroll was soon saving the company so much that it tore up the percentage deal, which might have made Kroll rich, and put him on a retainer.

Kroll told this story, probably not for the first time, to a crowd of students and faculty at Cornell last fall. “Spider-Man, the Hulk—I really owe my business to those superheroes,” he said. Kroll’s business, launched in 1972 as J. Kroll Associates, eventually became Kroll, Inc., the world’s preëminent detective agency, with three thousand employees, countless subcontractors, and offices in sixty cities in more than thirty-five countries.

According to the history professor who introduced Kroll that day, Kroll, Inc., specializes in “pursuing crime, particularly financial crime, across international borders.” And so Kroll told stories about recovering the wealth plundered by dictators, among them Ferdinand Marcos, Saddam Hussein, and Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier. Baby Doc, Kroll said, was “not the sharpest nail in the box.” He had looted the Haitian treasury by writing big checks. “Apartment in Trump Tower?” Kroll made a show of laborious penmanship. “ ‘Trump . . . Tower.’ Even we could figure that one out.”

*Kroll in his office in New York City. Photograph by Platon.*

Kroll is sixty-eight, tall, bald, and solidly built—he played rugby at Cornell, and was the starting catcher on the freshman baseball team. He moved stiffly, like an old athlete, as he paced the well of the lecture hall, and digressed freely, offering an account of how he had taken his future wife, Lynn, on a study date here at Cornell. (“You still have study dates?” Pause. “No.”) There was a large, alarming gash on the right side of his skull—it looked like a fresh machete wound. It was an incision from skin-cancer surgery, as Kroll eventually explained, adding that there was a lesson to be drawn from that: wear a hat. Kroll’s stories were nearly all morality tales. Abuses of trust are chronic and toxic, but they are there to be exposed. “The world is not becoming a more corrupt place,” he told the students. “In fact, it’s getting better. The issue of integrity is alive everywhere.” His role, his company’s role, was—Lynn hated this image, he said—“to help keep the fish tank clean.”

The first question, from a Nigerian student, was more in the nature of a plea. “In my country, you cannot imagine the corruption,” the young man said. “It is everywhere you look, and you can be killed for saying anything. Please, please come to Nigeria. We need you.”

“O.K.,” Kroll said, one hand outstretched as if to steady the young man. “O.K.” Kroll’s gaze—he has big, slightly bulging pale eyes—did not leave the Nigerian’s. “We are there. We’ve been to Nigeria about ten times in the past year or two. People exist there who want to turn things around. It’s a very tough environment. But we are there.” He asked the young man to write down his contact information.

A student from Germany asked how Kroll had the authority to conduct investigations. Wasn’t that role reserved for the police?

“No” was the short answer. Kroll needed a license to operate, that was all. Kroll then told a story about an American telecommunications company that was being extorted by Turkish hackers in Germany. The F.B.I. was not ready to get involved, so the company brought in Kroll. Kroll sent an operative into the hackers' midst, quickly gathering enough evidence to interest the F.B.I. "This is how I make my living," Kroll said. "The F.B.I. is busy."

Actually, that's not how Kroll has made his living, or, at least, not most of it. Breaking up extortion rings, nailing dictators—that's the Marvel Comics version of Jules Kroll's career. Kroll really made his living, and his name, on Wall Street. He owed his success not to Spider-Man but to Goldman Sachs and Skadden Arps and a long list of corporations, law firms, investment banks, management consultants, hedge funds, and brokerage houses. Kroll likes to say, "Sunlight is a wonderful antiseptic." But he and his company have been more highly valued for keeping things in the dark than for the occasional, client-approved exposé. They are the keepers of innumerable embarrassing, probably career-destroying, possibly corporation-destroying secrets. Jules Kroll may pose, credibly, as a crusader for truth and justice, but his life has been more interesting than that.

Kroll is widely credited with having created an industry where there was none. Call it corporate intelligence. There were, of course, plenty of detective agencies and security companies around when he started, but successful private investigators in the United States—Pinkerton, Wackenhut—have tended to expand into guard and alarm operations. Kroll took his business in another direction: upward, into finance and strategic planning. He offered an ever-widening range of services—forensic accounting, crisis management, competitor analysis—tooled for a globalized business world, in which industrial espionage, counterfeiting, computer fraud, identity fraud, and sophisticated financial crimes have flourished.

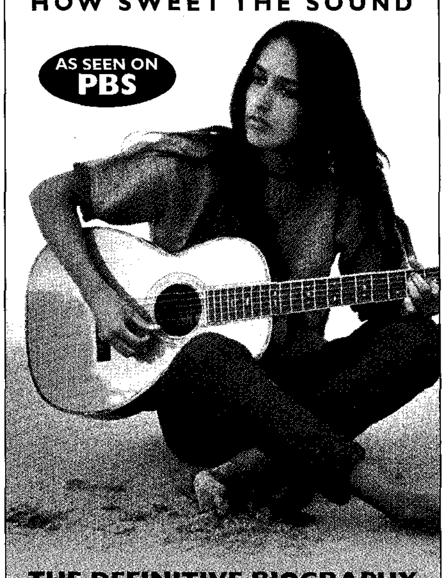
"He was legitimatizing private-detective work at a different level," Joe Rosetti, who was the vice-chairman of Kroll until 2001, said. Rosetti was the security director at I.B.M. when Kroll recruited him, in the early eighties.

In 2004, Kroll sold his company to Marsh & McLennan, an insurance conglomerate, for nearly two billion dollars in cash. Kroll, already a wealthy man, pocketed around a hundred and seventeen million dollars (his ownership stake, once a hundred per cent, was diluted after he took the company public, in 1997), and he stayed on to run Kroll, Inc., as a Marsh subsidiary. He retired in July, 2008. Constrained by a one-year non-compete agreement with Marsh from conducting any Kroll-type business, but now unconstrained by the client interest and discretion that had always restricted his role in public debates, Kroll began to speak in lectures and interviews about failures of corporate governance and the deep flaws of standard investment models. He knows an unusual amount about what laid the financial industry low last year. For traumatized investors betrayed by the credit-risk rating agencies, what is needed, he says, is "a whole new risk model."

"Risk mitigation" is one of Kroll's preferred descriptions of his line of work. Like other catchphrases that he has employed through the years—"professional services," "management consulting"—it helps rub off the patina of seediness attached to the term "private investigator," something that has been the bane of his branding efforts since the day he started. And in the integrity business—yet another way he describes his field—brand is everything.

Plan A was politics. Kroll's college classmates all seemed to foresee a career in public service for him. Jay O. Light, now the dean of the Harvard Business School, told me that he thought Julie, as he was known, might end up as governor of New York. Others thought, First Jewish President. Kroll was outgoing, popular; he was elected vice-president of the fraternity council. He had a photographic memory for faces and names. He fought, successfully, to repeal fraternity rules restricting membership to white Christians. He went to law school at Georgetown, and worked for Senator Robert F. Kennedy; in 1968, he helped coördinate Kennedy's Presidential campaign in Queens. In 1971, at twenty-nine, Kroll ran for the City Council. He was a reform Democrat, campaigning on an anti-corruption platform, and he got thrashed by the Democratic Party machine candidate.

Jay Light was surprised to hear after-



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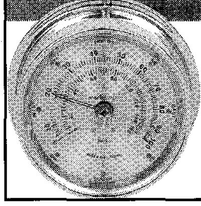

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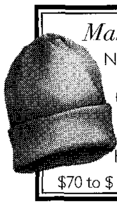

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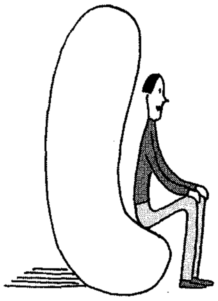
ward that Kroll had gone into business. "Jules was never interested in money," he said. But his election defeat had shaken Kroll. He had been right about the corruption in Queens; the candidate who won later went to prison. The machine felt unbeatable, though, and Kroll was in debt. He and Lynn had a new baby, and were so broke that their car was repossessed.

The first employees of J. Kroll Associates had printing backgrounds. When Kroll saw that fraud investigations were becoming a source of profit, he started hiring ex-detectives. He soon went into other industries. Trying to help a bank streamline its purchasing, he ended up in the warehousing business. "Once you've been invited into someone's dining room to feed them, you want to have more than salad to offer," he told me. "You gain their trust, they're going to want to try your soup and your dessert."



Early on, Kroll cultivated law firms as clients, though he avoided criminal-defense work. "I didn't want the government wondering which side we were on," he said. He also, for the most part, stayed away from divorces, a staple for private investigators. "My problem with divorce work wasn't just that it was déclassé," Kroll said. "It was that emotions ran so high, people were so upset, it actually spoiled relationships with clients. No matter how good a job you did, they'd never want to see you again. Seeing you would remind them of the worst moments in their lives."

Detective firms, on the whole, hire mostly retired cops. In 1981, Kroll hired Tommy Helsby, a failed philosopher—he had abandoned a dissertation at Cambridge University on "the metaphysical basis for formal logic." Helsby told me, "This was in the days when you could wander into Jules's office and wander out with a job." He is still at Kroll, serving as regional chairman for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, out of the company's London office. I asked Helsby if his training in metaphysics had helped him as an investigator. He thought it had.

Kroll hired former prosecutors, accountants, investigative journalists, academics, and specialized researchers. He looked for capable fact finders: people eager to comb through courthouse records, think through problems, knock on doors, and get strangers to tell them things. Helsby said, "The challenge was how to make all these different skills and professions work together. How to get the grizzled ex-cop to respect the twenty-five-year-old database jockey. How to make the lawyer get off his high horse, roll up his sleeves, and get down there and work with the accountants. It helped enormously that Jules treated everybody with respect."

"If you put together a team that's all ex-detectives, you'll get the same answer every time," Kroll said. "I like to mix it up. You need at least one woman on any team. She'll have a different view."

He lovingly buffed his company's image. "Jules used to joke that the third person he hired was his driver," Helsby said. "He carried himself like the captain of a billion-dollar corporation when we were a five-million-dollar corporation." Daniel Karson, who, before he started at Kroll, in 1983, was a prosecutor, said, "Jules never walked in the service entrance of any building, figuratively speaking. He considered himself the equal of any merchant banker, any law-firm partner."

In 1982, Drexel Burnham Lambert, the investment bank, agreed to underwrite a twenty-five-million-dollar public offering for a Minnesota charter-flight company that, as it turned out, flew almost no charter flights. Fred Joseph, Drexel's chief executive, was mortified. He asked a partner at Skadden Arps to recommend an investigator who could dig up all possible problems with potential counterparties. The Skadden partner sent over a list of names that included Dick Tracy, Charlie Chan, Sherlock Holmes, and Jules Kroll. The only phone number he had, he said, was Kroll's.

Joseph hired Kroll just as Drexel's business was taking off—this was the era of junk bonds and hostile takeovers. Kroll's work for Joseph was primarily due diligence on the people and companies that Drexel was considering underwriting. "Our business was everything you wanted to know about the legitimacy but were afraid to ask," Kroll told me. The go-go world of eighties investment banking was, Kroll found, strangely starved of facts—there were so many new players, and a mad rush to get deals done. This was true not only in New York but in Margaret Thatcher's deregulated London, where, in 1986, Kroll sent Dan Karson to open an office.

Kroll's background checks quickly became a standard business tool in the financial industry, even a verb—"We need to Kroll him." The lawyers in one complicated case told me that a room set aside for the most sensitive documents, with strictly controlled access, was known as the "Kroll room."

Quiet problem-solving became a Kroll mainstay. "Most of our most successful cases you will never hear about," Tommy Helsby told me. "No one will. That's the whole point of them." The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977, which required American companies doing business overseas to stop bribing foreign officials, generated a lot of auditing and compliance business. The company opened offices in Paris, Moscow, São Paulo, Tokyo, Singapore, and Manila, among other places. It began to provide clients with assessments of political and criminal risk; executive protection, also known as bodyguarding; and K. & R.—kidnapping prevention and, in the event of failure, ransom negotiations.

Overseas operations eventually accounted for a major part of Kroll's business. I asked Helsby if Kroll had stringers in every country on earth. "We currently don't have a guy in Antarctica," he said. "If you know anybody good, let me know."

Dan Karson worked on one international case for seven years. The clients, Nokia and Motorola, had separately made loans, totalling $2.7 billion, to a Turkish family, the Uzans, to build a mobile-phone network. The Uzans simply pocketed much of the money. Kroll helped find and seize their assets—apartments on Park Avenue, a mansion in Belgravia, a jet on the tarmac in Berlin. Rick Simonson, a Nokia executive, remembers a blizzard of shell companies, countersuits, threats, phony accounts, and frauds. "Jules had tracked enough people like them," Simonson said.

Kroll sometimes trumps the local

police. This happened in London, after an Italian banker named Roberto Calvi was found hanged under Blackfriars Bridge, in 1982. The death was initially ruled a suicide, but Calvi's family was not satisfied. Calvi, who was known as God's banker, because of his close ties to the Vatican, had had many powerful enemies, not least the Italian Mafia. The suicide ruling was later set aside. In 1991, the Calvi family hired Kroll. Among other things, the firm's investigators reassembled the scaffolding from which Calvi's body had been found suspended; had a man the same size and weight, dressed in an identical suit and loafers, climb by the only possible route; and then examined his shoes under a microscope. They had traces of paint and rust from the scaffolding on the soles; the ones Calvi was wearing did not. Kroll concluded that Calvi had been murdered.

Kroll's report elicited headlines in the British tabloids. The City of London police initially dismissed the report as amateurish, but Calvi's death was ultimately reclassified as a homicide. (In 2005, five people, several with ties to the Mafia, were charged in Rome with the killing. In 2007, they were acquitted.)

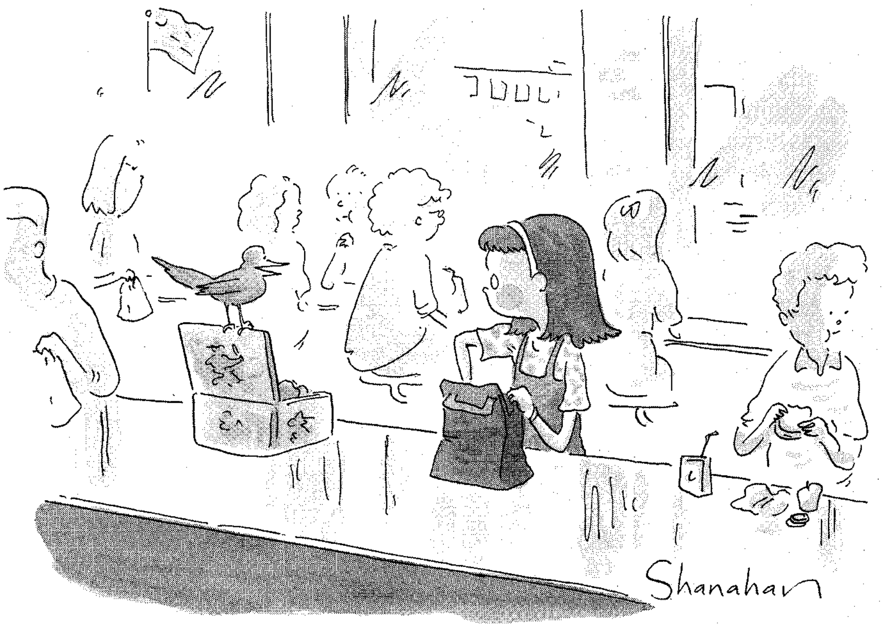
As Kroll became more successful, the firm had to be vigilant about entrapment by adversaries, competitors, or parties unknown. "We'd get a phone call from somewhere in Europe," Joe Rosetti said. " 'I have an assignment for you. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to intercept this or that.' And we'd say, 'First off, we don't take jobs over the phone. Second, we don't know you.' Just that word 'intercept' would raise a flag. We didn't do intercepts. That's illegal."

Clients, too, sometimes requested outlawry. "People ask us all the time to go crack that bank account," E. Norbert Garrett, who headed the firm's business-intelligence and information practice and now consults on the company's operation in Asia, told me. "Make the fake phone call, et cetera. But looking inside banks—that's illegal. We're tempted from time to time, but we just don't do it. We develop human sources, and that takes time." Kroll, Inc., does not have the power of subpoena or the power of arrest. Its investigators must use weapons that are both sharper and softer than those available to the police. Wiretaps, break-ins, bribes—Jules Kroll likes to dismiss competitors who use such tactics as "cowboys." But he has hired plenty of graduates of the C.I.A. and other secret services, such as M.I.6 and the Mossad, and has also been obliged to fire some for breaking the rules. With the end of the Cold War, a flood of former spies came onto the private-security market. Their methods and networks could be useful, particularly in countries, such as the ex-Soviet states, newly opened to foreign investment.

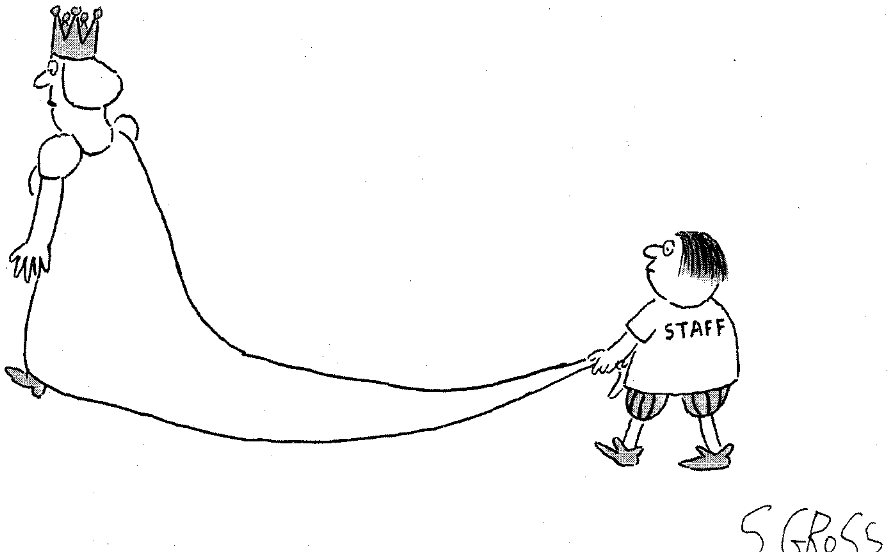
Kroll has hired two former New York City police commissioners: Robert McGuire, in 1989; and William Bratton, in 2000. McGuire was instrumental in landing a major contract to redesign the security system of the World Trade Center after the 1993 terrorist bombing. He also helped Kroll get named the monitor of a federal plan to force the Gambino crime family out of the trucking business in the garment district. A series of similar jobs—monitoring cleanups of the Los Angeles police and the Detroit police—came Kroll's way. They were a steadier income source than investigations.

Jules Kroll never liked living from case to case. Just waiting for jobs to come over the transom was too chancy. He had endless ideas for new lines of business, but rarely the revenue to implement them. In 1991, Maurice (Hank) Greenberg, then the chief of A.I.G., one of the world's largest insurance companies, convinced Kroll that they were in the same business: "risk." Two years later, Kroll sold about twenty-two per cent of his company to A.I.G. That gave him some of the acquisition capital he needed. In 1997, Kroll merged with an Ohio armored-car company and went public. Revenues soared and Kroll went on a company-buying spree. The merger later came undone. (It was a cultural problem, he said. "They can march. You can't teach them to swim.") But by 2004 Kroll, Inc., was worth more than a billion dollars.

Kroll has suffered its share of embarrassments. Its agents have admitted to Dumpster-diving through shredded documents once they're on public property. That happened in a fight between the cosmetics giants Avon and Mary Kay. But there are allegations that the firm has gone lower still. According to James B. Stewart's book "Den of Thieves," Martin A. Siegel, who, in 1987, had pleaded guilty to insider trading while at Kidder, Peabody, was harassed by Kroll operatives seeking to intimidate him so that he wouldn't testify against an arbitrageur at Goldman Sachs. The Kroll employees impersonated a New York City police officer and a journalist; scared off a potential donor to a children's camp



*"I'll trade you my cupcake for your head lice."*



that Siegel was setting up; and paid his sixteen-year-old babysitter fifty dollars for damning information about him. (Jules Kroll disputes this account.)

When I asked Kroll about the company's low moments, he said, unhappily, "The jeans wars. Jordache versus Guess. It was a full-blown brawl."

The company's "worst black eye," according to Kroll, came in Brazil in 2004, when the federal police raided the firm's São Paulo offices and arrested five employees. Kroll had been hired by Brasil Telecom to investigate whether the company's second-largest shareholder, Telecom Italia, was laying the groundwork for a takeover. The government accused Kroll of wiretapping, bribing officials, and illegally intercepting e-mails. The real reason for the raid, according to Jules Kroll, was a large payment made by Telecom Italia to former police authorities. (Telecom Italia says it played no role in the raid.) Meanwhile, he said, the company still hasn't recovered from "the pasting we took" in the Brazilian press.

But a deeper injury to the Kroll brand may be in the making. R. Allen Stanford, the Texas billionaire now in jail and facing charges of having operated, from a base in Antigua, a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme, was a longtime Kroll client. Kroll also gave at least one other client assurances about Stanford. In 2007, a Maryland-based foundation retained Kroll to evaluate the soundness of Stanford's bank, and Kroll produced a positive report. The foundation lost a substantial amount of money. (A spokeswoman for Kroll said that a lawsuit filed by the foundation has been resolved.) For more than a decade, Stanford fought off inquiries from a battery of United States government agencies—the F.B.I., the I.R.S., the S.E.C., the State Department—that were interested, variously, in whether he was laundering money for drug dealers, defrauding investors, avoiding taxes, or committing other crimes. He was finally indicted, last June. Kroll's dubious role in the Stanford saga was detailed in the July issue of *Vanity Fair*. Although no Kroll employees have been indicted, at least one has been fired. The Stanford case has the potential to show a company engaged in something other than the integrity business.

Kroll does not keep a list of cases and clients it turns down. (Allen Stanford should, clearly, have been on such a list.) Jules Kroll did tell me about an approach, in early 1992, from the first Clinton Presidential campaign, which was then floundering in the glare of the Gennifer Flowers affair. There might be others, Kroll understood, who would need to be investigated. Kroll said no.

"Every election, we get campaigns asking us to do opposition research," Dan Karson told me. "We won't do it. Not because we're afraid that the other guy might get elected but because we don't want to be associated with digging up dirt. If a campaign wants us to do due diligence on itself, that's different. We'll do it." Of course, Kroll routinely does intensive opposition research—"digging up dirt"—in corporate battles.

As it happened, the Clinton campaign came back to Kroll later, he says, in 1992. Staffers were worried that the Arkansas governor's mansion had been bugged. Kroll took that job. His agents swept the building and found nothing. I asked if he would have done the same for George W. Bush—not his favorite politician. "Sure," he said. "It's a public service."

Kroll's conception of public service—or, in another context, the national interest—is too subtle for some observers. The French, for example, have never understood it. When Kroll, working for the displaced government of Kuwait, revealed, in 1991, that Saddam Hussein was a major shareholder in Hachette, France's largest publisher, it confirmed an existing view in official Paris that, as Norb Garrett put it, "we're the C.I.A.'s stalking horse." Brian Jenkins, a former deputy chairman of Kroll, explained, "The French were projecting. Their secret service worked on behalf of their private sector, no apologies, and their companies working overseas reported to their secret service. They just figured we were being more clever about it and created this thing called Kroll."

With its international intelligence networks and their sometimes unnerving abilities, Kroll began to be described as "a private C.I.A." This was unhelpful. Garrett—who was the C.I.A.'s station chief in Cairo before he joined Kroll—told me, "We can't work in certain parts of the world if people believe we're C.I.A. We just can't."

In business terms, dictator-asset searches burnished the brand. Public investigations of corrupt, unpopular officials also raised Kroll's profile. In 1992, the Brazilian Congress impeached President Fernando Collor de Mello, largely on the basis of a Kroll report.

But not all governments are capable of making use of an investigation's results. Even after Kroll helped freeze Duvalier's assets, the new Haitian government was unwilling to execute basic legal maneuvers to claim them. The Haitians stopped paying their New York lawyers, a move that effectively took Kroll off the job. This outcome remains one of Jules Kroll's keenest professional regrets.

Garrett said, "You think you've really teed up the information for litigation, and a client doesn't want to do anything. You've got the goods on a cabinet minister or a Vice-President, and the government or the company or the family decides it doesn't want the embarrassment. To illuminate the playing field—that's our job, not to press charges. We're not prosecutors."

During the Boris Yeltsin era, the Russian Federation hired Kroll to trace the country's huge capital flight and unusual overseas K.G.B. accounts. "The fact that they hired us at a press conference should have told us they weren't serious," Helsby said. "They got their I.M.F. loan, which was the only real point, I suppose. We found good stuff, but it turned out they didn't want it. And then they didn't pay the balance of our bill." In 2006, the Russian parliament and the state prosecutor both announced that they were investigating Kroll for allegedly operating without a license.

I recalled a story that Brian Jenkins told me: "Jules and I were at Davos, maybe 1996. One night was a black-tie gala—heads of state, heads of the world's largest corporations. So, as we were walking down the stairway into this sea of plutocrats, Jules said, 'You know, Brian, half of these people are our clients.' And I said, 'Half of these people are our *subjects*.' I meant subjects of our investigations. And we were both right."

After Al Qaeda bombed the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, in 1998, Kroll faced a dilemma. The Clinton Administration had responded with cruise-missile attacks that destroyed, among other things, a factory in Khartoum that it claimed was producing nerve gas for Osama bin Laden. Salah Idris, the owner of the factory, wanted to sue the United States, which had frozen his bank accounts, and his lawyers in Washington, good Kroll clients, asked Kroll to investigate.

"Normally, we wouldn't take a case like that, against the U.S. government," Jules Kroll said. But he asked Norb Garrett to look into it.

"I saw that the facts didn't fit the Clinton Administration's description of things," Garrett told me. The alleged connection between Salah Idris and Osama bin Laden appeared unlikely. Idris's lawyer was a well-known human-rights advocate and opponent of Sudan's Islamist government, and the government of Saudi Arabia had granted Idris citizenship—something it would not readily have done for a bin Laden crony. "So I suggested we take it," Garrett said.

Kroll's investigation (like many others, including one for this magazine by Seymour Hersh) refuted Washington's claims. "I felt slightly guilty about it, because I didn't want to embarrass the agency, or the federal government," Garrett told me. "When the report was finished, I called George Tenet"—the C.I.A. director—"to see if he wanted to read it. I mean, we don't have access to electronic intercepts; we're not the C.I.A. At first, he said yes, but then he changed his mind, because of the litigation. So we, along with his lawyers, briefed some House staffers on it, just to try to keep our skirts clean with the federal government." (On the day the U.S. had to respond to Idris's suit, his bank accounts were released.)

Garrett explained the disparity between what Kroll could do and what the C.I.A. could in a place like Sudan. "They have to rely on public and covert sources," he said. "But we can go straight to Salah Idris. He's our client, after all. We can go straight to his friends. We can be manipulated, of course, shown incomplete information, and sometimes we have to walk away from a case if we don't trust somebody. But we definitely have some advantages."

The terrorist attacks of September 11th generated a grim surge in business for Kroll, as corporations rushed to improve their security plans. Jules Kroll had long since left individual case management to others, although he still met with clients and liked to "feel the threads" of investigations in progress. He was now running a large, complex organization, with much of its workforce overseas and at least five offices that were actually bigger than the one in New York. "Jules was always playing the long game," Dan Karson said.

Now the game seemed to be to sell Kroll, Inc., while the selling was good. Kroll set his sights on Marsh & McLennan, the world's biggest insurance broker. This was early 2004, and Eliot Spitzer, then New York's attorney general, had been looking into Putnam, Marsh's mutual-fund subsidiary. Kroll met with Marsh. Not only did his company specialize in regulatory compliance; Michael Cherkasky, one of its executives, had been Spitzer's mentor in the Manhattan D.A.'s office.

Marsh and Kroll, it was implied, might be a good corporate fit. Marsh was interested, but would move to acquire Kroll only if Jules Kroll and the rest of the leadership stayed and ran it. Kroll agreed. The two sides went back and forth over whether the deal would include Marsh stock, but in mid-May, one month after Spitzer subpoenaed Marsh, they settled on an all-cash agreement: $1.9 billion, paid in July, 2004. Three months later, Spitzer charged Marsh with price-fixing and collusion, and Marsh's stock fell by almost fifty per cent. It has never recovered. Kroll's luck, or timing, had been superb.

Did selling Kroll to a client that was under investigation harm the Kroll brand? It doesn't seem so: revenue is strong. The fraud-investigation business, people say, is countercyclical: when times are bad in other fields, fraud rises, or is exposed, and jobs pour in.

But Kroll, Inc., has not been the same since Jules Kroll left. "It's a little like growing up and leaving home, except in this case it's Daddy who left," Tommy Helsby said. "Being out of the warming rays of Jules Kroll's personality, people feel they've lost something. We will become less intense. We will become more of a normal company. It may be a healthy thing."

Norb Garrett has his doubts about normalcy, which has been creeping up on Kroll for more than a decade, owing to its acquisitions. "Our new sister companies wanted to integrate operations more," he said. "That sort of transparency does sort of complicate our lives, as we get bigger and more mainstream. They asked me to write a code of conduct, which I refused to do. . . . They asked me point blank if I had ever lied. I had been working under an *alias*, for Christ's sake!"

Kroll can see Manhattan from his house, which sits on a headland called Parsonage Point, on Long Island Sound, in Rye. The winding driveway is lined with plastic "Drive Slow" kids, evidence of seven young grandchildren.

The house is big and comfortable but not particularly grand. There are two other houses on the property. Alex Rodriguez rented one last season.

The four Kroll children all claim that they had normal lives as kids in Rye. Their father coached their soccer and Little League teams. Nick, the youngest, who is now a comedian and a writer in Los Angeles, said, "There were kids whose dads were middling accountants in Port Chester who couldn't make it to a game. My dad, who'd been out chasing Marcos and Baby Doc, was the coach. He never said, 'Oh, I have a big job, I'm busy.' " (Nick was, however, embarrassed when his father arrived at a Little League game in a limousine.) During the Saddam investigation, Kroll hired off-duty policemen to block the driveway of the house. The *Post* later darkly mentioned "potential assassins." He told me he was just being cautious.

The importance of discretion was impressed on the children. Nick said, "I was always, like, 'Dad, is the house bugged?' " Vanessa, the second-youngest, said, "People came to him in crises, on their worst days." She worked in civil-rights enforcement at the Department of Justice after college and, later, as an analyst at Kroll. Dana Kroll Carlos, the second-oldest, had a first career in sustainable agriculture; she was, until recently, in charge of corporate responsibility and diversity for Kroll. Dana said of her father, "He put a lot of trust in us. There were always these important phone calls, even on weekends."

I knew what she meant about the phone calls. During our interviews, Kroll took many of them. A local mogul, calling on behalf of someone planning to launch "the Kroll of Israel"; Susan Isaacs, the novelist, wanting to know, for research purposes, what would happen first if a prominent financier disappeared. Kroll told her about being brought in after the kidnapping, in 2003, of Eddie Lampert, a billionaire hedge-fund manager in Greenwich. For other calls, requiring privacy, he withdrew into a glass-walled office.

Kroll's discretion lives, somewhat mysteriously, alongside a deep gregariousness. He loves to tell stories, digress, and speculate, and his enthusiasms are beguiling. But, for all his freedom to speak his mind now that he is no longer accountable to shareholders, he struck me as being still, in many ways, a walking vault of confidential information.

Jeremy Kroll, the oldest sibling, who is thirty-eight, has a sober business mind. He helped take Kroll, Inc., into computer forensics, which ended up being one of its most profitable arms. But he is probably best known at the firm for having led a team, in 2001, that seized equipment and gathered electronic evidence at a bank in Bosnia where a group of Kroll auditors had earlier been taken hostage by Croats. The Croats were angry about an investigation into the misuse of a large pile of United Nations money. Everybody got home safely, and the U.N. got its money back.

Jeremy told me that it had taken him a while "to come to grips with the whole father-son experience in business." He now seems to have found his way. After Jules's non-compete agreement with Marsh & McLennan lapsed, this summer, he and Jeremy launched K2 Global Consultants, a risk-consulting and investigations firm that one industry analyst quickly dubbed Kroll & Son. They just opened their first overseas office, in London.

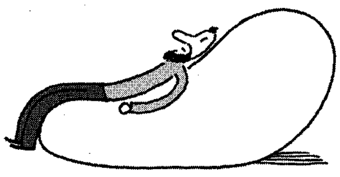
Jules Kroll was in his sunroom, ten yards from the water. He was wearing a blue pullover and boat shoes. It was overcast, and bleached cattails were thrashing in the wind. Kroll was feeling happy about news that the state-owned aluminum company in Bahrain was suing Alcoa, the aluminum maker, for allegedly conspiring to bribe Bahraini officials. (Alcoa has denied the allegation.) Nothing against Alcoa, but this was good.

"A government-run enterprise suing a company for bribing its own people. It's a great precedent"—the sort that portends waves of business, he believes, for companies like Kroll. "There is so much due diligence to be done in developing countries," he said.

Lynn Kroll was reading the paper, gasping at the latest economic news.

"It'll reflate," her husband said, without immense conviction.

Lynn, who worked for nonprofit groups before the kids were born, is now a full-time philanthropist. There's a Lynn and Jules Kroll Fund for Jewish Documentary Film. Among the recent films it helped finance was "Waltz with Bashir."



Kroll sipped coffee, staring out across the wind-ripped water. Manhattan was a spiky clump of towers on the southwest horizon.

"There's a lot of Monday-morning quarterbacking going on," he said. "The issue now is how to find a better balance between public and private control. But it's not easy to get the proper tension on the line. The political class is going to have a dramatically larger role. Politicians will be appointing administrators over financial institutions that in turn contribute to politicians."

Kroll took a call. "Ambassador, how's the jaw?"

People wanted to know what he was thinking. Some wanted in. What he was thinking, he told me, was about starting "a risk-rating agency on steroids." The big credit-rating agencies had failed, comprehensively, to price risk accurately. Their basic setup, in which the companies issuing securities were the ones who paid to have them rated, was flawed.

"Credit ratings turned out to be a false god," Kroll said. "People relied on those ratings. Now they're saying, 'Oh, we gave it a high rating but we were just expressing an opinion.' And that's bullshit. These structured instruments—why shouldn't we be able to rely on these ratings, as investors?"

A main theme in Kroll's new projects, or potential projects, is trust—perhaps the scarcest commodity in today's financial markets. "I'd like to do the same thing I did with the investigations business," Kroll said. "Change the business model." A new credit-rating firm could be launched by early 2010. Pointing at me, he said, "We have to convince the Finnegan Corporation that this will be a more honest process. That's where the Kroll name comes in."

He got up and started pacing. Kroll can't sit for long—old baseball injuries, he said. He seemed to be thinking hard. "Somebody's got to do this," he said finally. He was looking across the water, to where patches of sun lit up bits of the north shore of Long Island. "It might do some good," he said. "It might even make some money." ♦

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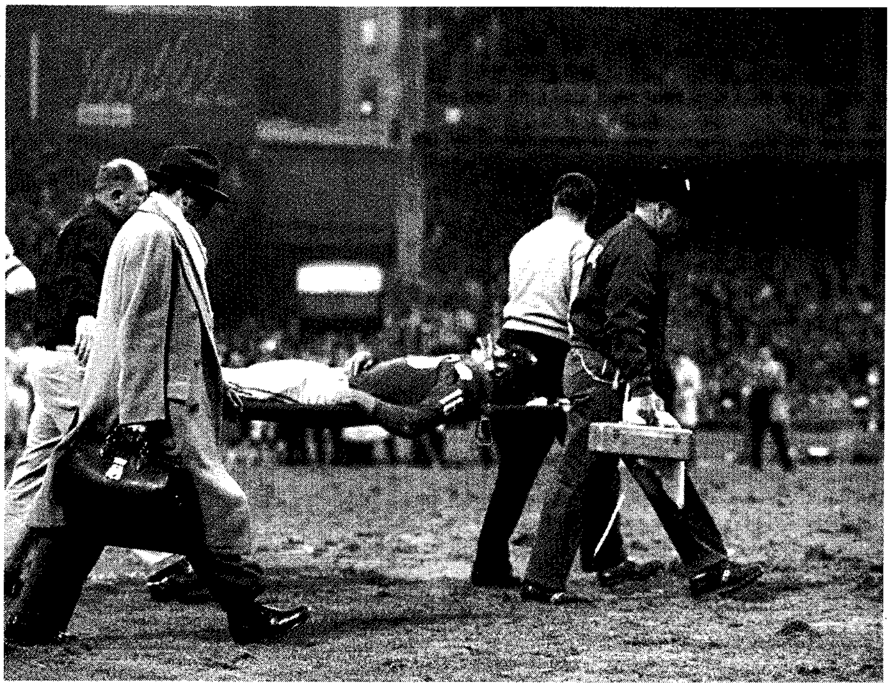


ANNALS OF MEDICINE

# OFFENSIVE PLAY

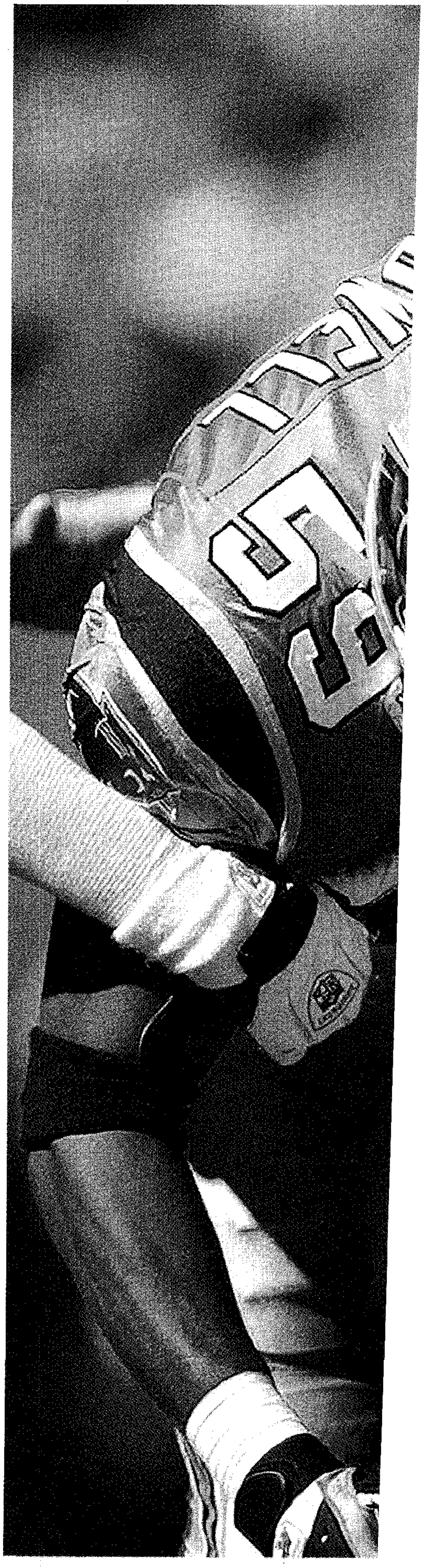
*How different are dogfighting and football?*

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

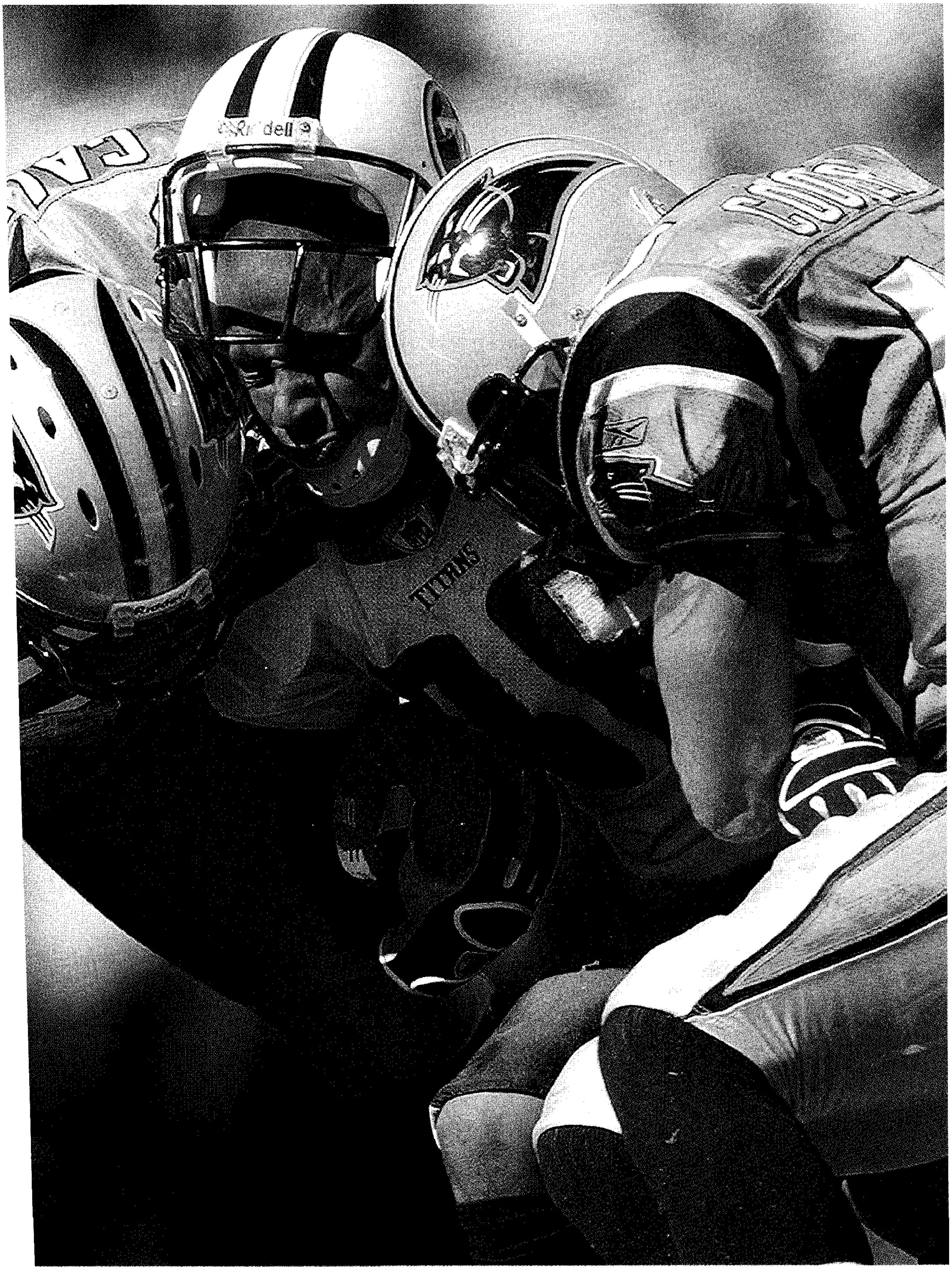
One evening in August, Kyle Turley was at a bar in Nashville with his wife and some friends. It was one of the countless little places in the city that play live music. He'd ordered a beer, but was just sipping it, because he was driving home. He had eaten an hour and a half earlier. Suddenly, he felt a sensation of heat. He was light-headed, and began to sweat. He had been having episodes like that with increasing frequency during the past year—headaches, nausea. One month, he had vertigo every day, bouts in which he felt as if he were stuck to a wall. But this was worse. He asked his wife if he could sit on her stool for a moment. The warmup band was still playing, and he remembers saying, "I'm just going to take a nap right here until the next band comes on." Then he was lying on the floor, and someone was standing over him. "The guy was freaking out," Turley recalled. "He was saying, 'Damn, man, I couldn't find a pulse,' and my wife said, 'No, no. You were breathing.' I'm, like, 'What? What?' "

They picked him up. "We went out in the parking lot, and I just lost it," Turley went on. "I started puking everywhere. I couldn't stop. I got in the car, still puking. My wife, she was really scared, because I had never passed out like that before, and I started becoming really paranoid. I went into a panic. We get to the emergency room. I started to lose control. My limbs were shaking, and I couldn't speak. I was conscious, but I couldn't speak the words I wanted to say."

Turley is six feet five. He is thirty-four years old, with a square jaw and blue eyes. For nine years, before he retired, in 2007, he was an offensive lineman in the National Football League. He knew all the stories about former football players. Mike Webster, the longtime Pittsburgh Steeler and one of the greatest players in N.F.L. history, ended his life a recluse, sleeping on the floor of the Pittsburgh Amtrak station. Another former



*An offensive lineman can't do his job with*



*ing his head," one veteran says, but neuropathologists examining the brains of ex-N.F.L. players have found trauma-related degeneration.*

BILL FRAKES/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY; OPPOSITE: KIDWILER COLLECTION/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY

Pittsburgh Steeler, Terry Long, drifted into chaos and killed himself four years ago by drinking antifreeze. Andre Waters, a former defensive back for the Philadelphia Eagles, sank into depression and pleaded with his girlfriend—"I need help, somebody help me"—before shooting himself in the head. There were men with aching knees and backs and hands, from all those years of playing football. But their real problem was with their heads, the one part of their body that got hit over and over again.

"Lately, I've tried to break it down," Turley said. "I remember, every season, multiple occasions where I'd hit someone so hard that my eyes went cross-eyed, and they wouldn't come uncrossed for a full series of plays. You are just out there, trying to hit the guy in the middle, because there are three of them. You don't remember much. There are the cases where you hit a guy and you'd get into a collision where everything goes *off*. You're dazed. And there are the others where you are involved in a big, long drive. You start on your own five-yard line, and drive all the way down the field—fifteen, eighteen plays in a row sometimes. Every play: collision, collision, collision. By the time you get to the other end of the field, you're seeing spots. You feel like you are going to black out. Literally, these white explosions—*boom*, *boom*, *boom*—lights getting dimmer and brighter, dimmer and brighter.

"Then, there was the time when I got knocked unconscious. That was in St. Louis, in 2003. My wife said that I was out a minute or two on the field. But I was *gone* for about four hours after that. It was the last play of the third quarter. We were playing the Packers. I got hit in the back of the head. I saw it on film a little while afterward. I was running downfield, made a block on a guy. We fell to the ground. A guy was chasing the play, a little guy, a defensive back, and he jumped over me as I was coming up, and he kneed me right in the back of the head. *Boom!*

"They sat me down on the bench. I remember Marshall Faulk coming up and joking with me, because he knew that I was messed up. That's what happens in the N.F.L: 'Oooh. You got effed up. Oooh.' The trainer came up to me and said, 'Kyle, let's take you to the locker room.' I remember looking up at a clock, and there was only a minute and a half left in the game—and I had no idea that much time had elapsed. I showered and took all my gear off. I was sitting at my locker. I don't remember anything. When I came back, after being hospitalized, the guys were joking with me because Georgia Frontiere"—then the team's owner—"came in the locker room, and they said I was butt-ass naked and I gave her a big hug. They were dying laughing, and I was, like, 'Are you serious? I did that?'

"They cleared me for practice that Thursday. I probably shouldn't have. I don't know what damage I did from that, because my head was really hurting. But when you're coming off an injury you're frustrated. I wanted to play the next game. I was just so mad that this happened to me that I'm overdoing it. I was just going after guys in practice. I was really trying to use my head more, because I was so frustrated, and the coaches on the sidelines are, like, 'Yeah. We're going to win this game. He's going to lead the team.' That's football. You're told either that you're hurt or that you're injured. There is no middle ground. If you are hurt, you can play. If you are injured, you can't, and the line is whether you can walk and if you can put on a helmet and pads."

Turley said that he loved playing football so much that he would do it all again. Then he began talking about what he had gone through in the past year. The thing that scared him most about that night at the bar was that it felt exactly like the time he was knocked unconscious. "It was identical," he said. "It was my worst episode ever."

In August of 2007, one of the highest-paid players in professional football, the quarterback Michael Vick, pleaded guilty to involvement in a dogfighting ring. The police raided one of his properties, a farm outside Richmond, Virginia, and found the bodies of dead dogs buried on the premises, along with evidence that some of the animals there had been tortured and electrocuted. Vick was suspended from football. He was sentenced to twenty-three months in prison. The dogs on his farm were seized by the court, and the most damaged were sent to an animal sanctuary in Utah for rehabilitation. When Vick applied for reinstatement to the National Football League, this summer, he was asked to undergo psychiatric testing. He then met with the commissioner of the league, Roger Goodell, for four and a half hours, so that Goodell could be sure that he was genuinely remorseful.

"I probably considered every alternative that I could think of," Goodell told reporters, when he finally allowed Vick back into the league. "I reached out to an awful lot of people to get their views—not only on what was right for the young man but also what was right for our society and the N.F.L."

Goodell's job entails dealing with players who have used drugs, driven drunk and killed people, fired handguns in night clubs, and consorted with thugs and accused murderers. But he clearly felt what many Americans felt as well—that dogfighting was a moral offense of a different order.

Here is a description of a dogfight given by the sociologists Rhonda Evans and Craig Forsyth in "The Social Milieu of Dogmen and Dogfights," an article they published some years ago in the journal *Deviant Behavior*. The fight took place in Louisiana between a local dog, Black, owned by a man named L.G., and Snow, whose owner, Rick, had come from Arizona:

> The handlers release their dogs and Snow and Black lunge at one another. Snow rears up and overpowers Black, but Black manages to come back with a quick locking of the jaws on Snow's neck. The crowd is cheering wildly and yelling out bets. Once a dog gets a lock on the other, they will hold on with all their might. The dogs flail back and forth and all the while Black maintains her hold.

In a dogfight, whenever one of the dogs "turns"—makes a submissive gesture with its head—the two animals are separated and taken back to their corners. Each dog, in alternation, then "scratches"—is released to charge at its opponent. After that first break, it is Snow's turn to scratch. She races toward Black:

> Snow goes straight for the throat and grabs hold with her razor-sharp teeth. Almost immediately, blood flows from Black's throat. Despite a serious injury to the throat, Black manages to continue fighting back. They are relentless, each battling the other and neither willing to accept defeat. This fighting continues for an hour. [Finally, the referee] gives the third and final pit call. It is Black's turn to scratch and she is severely wounded. Black manages to crawl across the pit to meet her opponent. Snow attacks Black and she is too

> weak to fight back. L.G. realizes that this is it for Black and calls the fight. Snow is declared the winner.

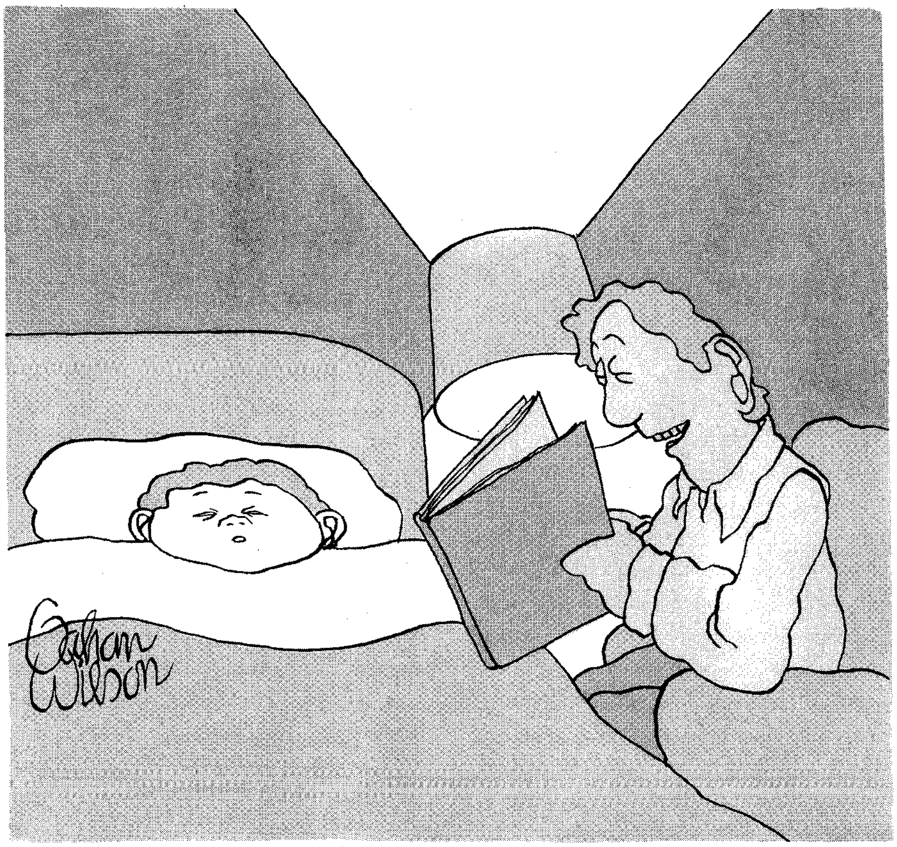
Afterward, Snow's owner collects his winnings; L.G. carries Black from the ring. "Her back legs are broken and blood is gushing from her throat," Evans and Forsyth write. "A shot rings out barely heard over the noise in the barn. Black's body is wrapped up and carried by her owner to his vehicle."

It's the shot ringing out that seals the case against dogfighting. L.G. willingly submitted his dog to a contest that culminated in her suffering and destruction. And why? For the entertainment of an audience and the chance of a payday. In the nineteenth century, dogfighting was widely accepted by the American public. But we no longer find that kind of transaction morally acceptable in a sport. "I was not aware of dogfighting and the terrible things that happen around dogfighting," Goodell said, explaining why he responded so sternly in the Vick case. One wonders whether, had he spent as much time talking to Kyle Turley as he did to Michael Vick, he'd start to have similar doubts about his own sport.

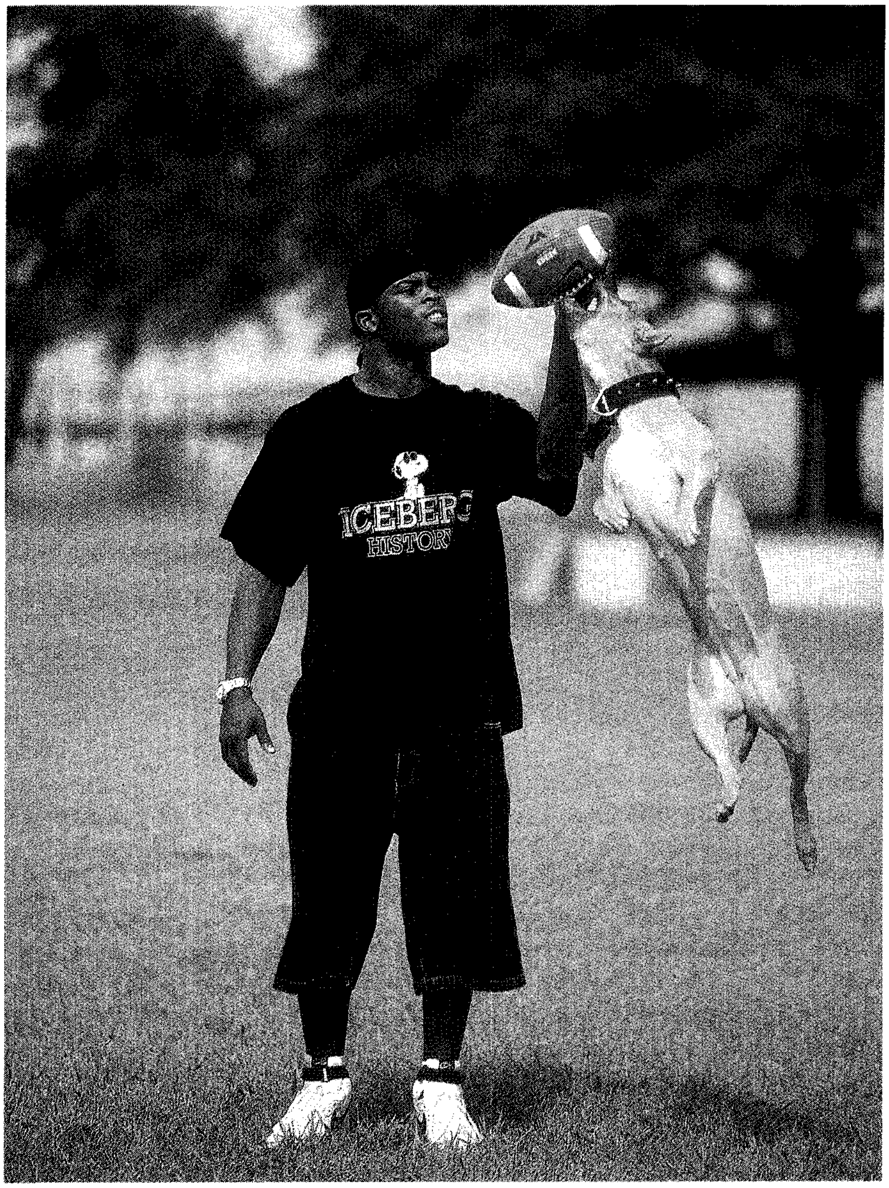
In 2003, a seventy-two-year-old patient at the Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts, died, fifteen years after receiving a diagnosis of dementia. Patients in the hospital's dementia ward are routinely autopsied, as part of the V.A.'s research efforts, so the man's brain was removed and "fixed" in a formaldehyde solution. A laboratory technician placed a large slab of the man's cerebral tissue on a microtome—essentially, a sophisticated meat slicer—and, working along the coronal plane, cut off dozens of fifty-micron shavings, less than a hairbreadth thick. The shavings were then immunostained—bathed in a special reagent that would mark the presence of abnormal proteins with a bright, telltale red or brown stain on the surface of the tissue. Afterward, each slice was smoothed out and placed on a slide.

The stained tissue of Alzheimer's patients typically shows the two trademarks of the disease—distinctive patterns of the proteins beta-amyloid and tau. Beta-amyloid is thought to lay the groundwork for dementia. Tau marks the critical second stage of the disease: it's the protein that steadily builds up in brain cells, shutting them down and ultimately killing them. An immunostain of an Alzheimer's patient looks, under the microscope, as if the tissue had been hit with a shotgun blast: the red and brown marks, corresponding to amyloid and tau, dot the entire surface. But this patient's brain was different. There was damage only to specific surface regions of his brain, and the stains for amyloid came back negative. "This was all tau," Ann McKee, who runs the hospital's neuropathology laboratory, said. "There was not even a whiff of amyloid. And it was the most extraordinary damage. It was one of those cases that really took you aback." The patient may have been in an Alzheimer's facility, and may have looked and acted as if he had Alzheimer's. But McKee realized that he had a different condition, called chronic traumatic encephalopathy (C.T.E.), which is a progressive neurological disorder found in people who have suffered some kind of brain trauma. C.T.E. has many of the same manifestations as Alzheimer's: it begins with behavioral and personality changes, followed by disinhibition and irritability, before moving on to dementia. And C.T.E. appears later in life as well, because it takes a long time for the initial trauma to give rise to nerve-cell breakdown and death. But C.T.E. isn't the result of an endogenous disease. It's the result of injury. The patient, it turned out, had been a boxer in his youth. He had suffered from dementia for fifteen years because, decades earlier, he'd been hit too many times in the head.

McKee's laboratory does the neuropathology work for both the giant Framingham heart study, which has been running since 1948, and Boston University's New England Centenarian Study, which analyzes the brains of people who are unusually long-lived. "I'm looking at brains constantly," McKee said. "Then I ran across another one. I saw it and said, 'Wow, it looks just like the last case.' This time, there was no known history of boxing. But then I called the family, and heard that the guy



*". . . went to sleep. And then Mr. Donkey became very quiet and drowsy and he went to sleep. And then Miss Mouse became very quiet and drowsy and she went to sleep. And then Mrs. Bear became very quiet and drowsy and she went to sleep. And then . . ."*



*Dogfighters like Michael Vick exploit their animals' eagerness to please a master.*

HEINZ KLUETMEIER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY

had been a boxer in his twenties." You can't see tau except in an autopsy, and you can't see it in an autopsy unless you do a very particular kind of screen. So now that McKee had seen two cases, in short order, she began to wonder: how many people who we assume have Alzheimer's—a condition of mysterious origin—are actually victims of preventable brain trauma?

McKee linked up with an activist named Chris Nowinski, a former college football player and professional wrestler who runs a group called the Sports Legacy Institute, in Boston. In his football and wrestling careers, Nowinski suffered six concussions (that he can remember), the last of which had such severe side effects that he has become a full-time crusader against brain injuries in sports. Nowinski told McKee that he would help her track down more brains of ex-athletes. Whenever he read an obituary of someone who had played in a contact sport, he'd call up the family and try to persuade them to send the player's brain to Bedford. Usually, they said no. Sometimes they said yes. The first brain McKee received was from a man in his mid-forties who had played as a linebacker in the N.F.L. for ten years. He accidentally shot himself while cleaning a gun. He had at least three concussions in college, and eight in the pros. In the years before his death, he'd had memory lapses, and had become more volatile. McKee immunostained samples of his brain tissue, and saw big splotches of tau all over the frontal and temporal lobes. If he hadn't had the accident, he would almost certainly have ended up in a dementia ward.

Nowinski found her another ex-football player. McKee saw the same thing. She has now examined the brains of sixteen ex-athletes, most of them ex-football players. Some had long careers and some played only in college. Some died of dementia. Some died of unrelated causes. Some were old. Some were young. Most were linemen or linebackers, although there was one wide receiver. In one case, a man who had been a linebacker for sixteen years, you could see, without the aid of magnification, that there was trouble: there was a shiny tan layer of scar tissue, right on the surface of the frontal lobe, where the brain had repeatedly slammed into the skull. It was the kind of scar you'd get only if you used your head as a battering ram. You could also see that some of the openings in the brain were larger than you'd expect, as if the surrounding tissue had died and shrunk away. In other cases, everything seemed entirely normal until you looked under the microscope and saw the brown ribbons of tau. But all sixteen of the ex-athlete brains that McKee had examined—those of the two boxers, plus the ones that Nowinski had found for her—had something in common: every one had abnormal tau.

The other major researcher looking at athletes and C.T.E. is the neuropathologist Bennet Omalu. He diagnosed the first known case of C.T.E. in an ex-N.F.L. player back in September of 2002, when he autopsied the former Pittsburgh Steelers center Mike Webster. He also found C.T.E. in the former Philadelphia Eagles defensive back Andre Waters, and in the former Steelers linemen Terry Long and Justin Strzelczyk, the latter of whom was killed when he drove the wrong way down a freeway and crashed his car, at ninety miles per hour, into a tank truck. Omalu has only once failed to find C.T.E. in a professional football player, and that was a twenty-four-year-old running back who had played in the N.F.L. for only two years.

"There is something wrong with this group as a cohort," Omalu says. "They forget things. They have slurred speech. I have had an N.F.L. player come up to me at a funeral and tell me he can't find his way home. I have wives who call me and say, 'My husband was a very good man. Now he drinks all the time. I don't know why his behavior changed.' I have wives call me and say, 'My husband was a nice guy. Now he's getting abusive.' I had someone call me and say, 'My husband went back to law school after football and became a lawyer. Now he can't do his job. People are suing him.' "

McKee and Omalu are trying to make sense of the cases they've seen so far. At least some of the players are thought to have used steroids, which has led to the suggestion that brain injury might in some way be enhanced by drug use. Many of the players also share a genetic risk factor for neurodegenerative diseases, so perhaps deposits of tau are the result of brain trauma coupled with the weakened ability of the brain to repair itself. McKee says that she will need to see at least fifty cases before she can draw any firm conclusions. In the meantime, late last month the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research released the findings of an N.F.L.-funded phone survey of just over a thousand randomly selected retired N.F.L. players—all of whom had played in the league for at least three seasons. Self-reported studies are notoriously unreliable instruments, but, even so, the results were alarming. Of those players who were older than fifty, 6.1 per cent reported that they had received a diagnosis of "dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or other memory-related disease." That's five times higher than the national average for that age group. For players between the ages of thirty and forty-nine, the reported rate was nineteen times the national average. (The N.F.L. has distributed five million dollars to former players with dementia.)

"A long time ago, someone suggested that the [C.T.E. rate] in boxers was twenty per cent," McKee told me. "I think it's probably higher than that among boxers, and I also suspect that it's going to end up being higher than that among football players as well. Why? Because every brain I've seen has this. To get this number in a sample this small is really unusual, and the findings are so far out of the norm. I only can say that because I have looked at thousands of brains for a long time. This isn't something that you just see. I did the same exact thing for all the individuals from the Framingham heart study. We study them until they die. I run these exact same proteins, make these same slides—and we never see this."

McKee's laboratory occupies a warren of rooms, in what looks like an old officers' quarters on the V.A. campus. In one of the rooms, there is an enormous refrigerator, filled with brains packed away in hundreds of plastic containers. Nearby is a tray with small piles of brain slices. They look just like the ginger shavings that come with an order of sushi. Now McKee went to the room next to her office, sat down behind a microscope, and inserted one of the immunostained slides under the lens.

"This is Tom McHale," she said. "He started out playing for Cornell. Then he went to Tampa Bay. He was the man who died of substance abuse at the age of forty-five. I only got fragments of the brain. But it's just showing huge accumulations of tau for a forty-five-year-old—ridiculously abnormal."

She placed another slide under the microscope. "This individual was forty-nine years old. A football player. Cognitively intact. He never had any rage behavior. He had the distinctive abnormalities. Look at the hypothalamus." It was dark with tau. She put another slide in. "This guy was in his mid-sixties," she said. "He died of an unrelated medical condition. His name is Walter Hilgenberg. Look at the hippocampus. It's wall-to-wall tangles. Even in a bad case of Alzheimer's, you don't see that." The brown pigment of the tau stain ran around the edge of the tissue sample in a thick, dark band. "It's like a big river."

McKee got up and walked across the corridor, back to her office. "There's one last thing," she said. She pulled out a large photographic blowup of a brain-tissue sample. "This is a kid. I'm not allowed to talk about how he died. He was a good student. This is his brain. He's eighteen years old. He played football. He'd been playing football for a couple of years." She pointed to a series of dark spots on the image, where the stain had marked the presence of something abnormal. "He's got all this tau. This is frontal and this is insular. Very close to insular. Those same vulnerable regions." This was a teen-ager, and already his brain showed the kind of decay that is usually associated with old age. "This is completely inappropriate," she said. "You don't see tau like this in an eighteen-year-old. You don't see tau like this in a *fifty*-year-old."

McKee is a longtime football fan. She is from Wisconsin. She had two statuettes of Brett Favre, the former Green Bay Packers quarterback, on her bookshelf. On the wall was a picture of a robust young man. It was McKee's son—nineteen years old, six feet three. If he had a chance to join the N.F.L., I asked her, what would she advise him? "I'd say, 'Don't. Not if you want to have a life after football.' "

At the core of the C.T.E. research is a critical question: is the kind of injury being uncovered by McKee and Omalu incidental to the game of football or inherent in it? Part of what makes dogfighting so repulsive is the understanding that violence and injury cannot be removed from the sport. It's a feature of the sport that dogs almost always get hurt. Something like stock-car racing, by contrast, is dangerous, but not unavoidably so.

In 2000 and 2001, four drivers in Nascar's élite Sprint Cup Series were killed in crashes, including the legendary Dale Earnhardt. In response, Nascar mandated stronger seats, better seat belts and harnesses, and ignition kill switches, and completed the installation of expensive new barriers on the walls of its racetracks, which can absorb the force of a crash much better than concrete. The result is that, in the past eight years, no one has died in Nascar's three national racing series. Stock-car fans are sometimes caricatured as bloodthirsty, eagerly awaiting the next spectacular crash. But there is little blood these days in Nascar crashes. Last year, at Texas Motor Speedway, Michael McDowell hit an oil slick, slammed head first into the wall at a hundred and eighty miles per hour, flipped over and over, leaving much of his car in pieces on the track, and, when the vehicle finally came to a stop, crawled out of the wreckage and walked away. He raced again the next day. So what is football? Is it dogfighting or is it stock-car racing?

Football faced a version of this question a hundred years ago, after a series of ugly incidents. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt called an emergency summit at the White House, alarmed, as the historian John Sayle Watterson writes, "that the brutality of the prize ring had invaded college football and might end up destroying it." Columbia University dropped the sport entirely. A professor at the University of Chicago called it a "boy-killing, man-mutilating, money-making, education-prostituting, gladiatorial sport." In December of 1905, the presidents of twelve prominent colleges met in New York and came within one vote of abolishing the game. But the main objection at the time was to a style of play—densely and dangerously packed offensive strategies—that, it turns out, could be largely corrected with rule changes, like the legalization of the forward pass and the doubling of the first-down distance from five yards to ten. Today, when we consider subtler and more insidious forms of injury, it's far from clear whether the problem is the style of play or the play itself.

Take the experience of a young defensive lineman for the University of North Carolina football team, who suffered two concussions during the 2004 season. His case is one of a number studied by Kevin Guskiewicz, who runs the university's Sports Concussion Research Program. For the past five seasons, Guskiewicz and his team have tracked every one of the football team's practices and games using a system called HITS, in which six sensors are placed inside the helmet of every player on the field, measuring the force and location of every blow he receives to the head. Using the HITS data, Guskiewicz was able to reconstruct precisely what happened each time the player was injured.

"The first concussion was during preseason. The team was doing two-a-days," he said, referring to the habit of practicing in both the morning and the evening in the preseason. "It was August 9th, 9:55 A.M. He has an 80-g hit to the front of his head. About ten minutes later, he has a 98-g acceleration to the front of his head." To put those numbers in perspective, Guskiewicz explained, if you drove your car into a wall at twenty-five miles per hour and you weren't wearing your seat belt, the force of your head hitting the windshield would be around 100 gs: in effect, the player had two car accidents that morning. He survived both without incident. "In the evening session, he experiences this 64-g hit to the same spot, the front of the head. Still not reporting anything. And then this happens." On his laptop, Guskiewicz ran the video from the practice session. It was a simple drill: the lineman squaring off against an offensive player who wore the number 76. The other player ran toward the lineman and brushed past him, while delivering a glancing blow to the defender's helmet. "Seventy-six does a little quick elbow. It's 63 gs, the lowest of the four, but he sustains a concussion."

*"We took care of our leaf problem a long time ago."*

"The second injury was nine weeks later," Guskiewicz continued. "He's now recovered from the initial injury. It's a game out in Utah. In warmups, he takes a 76-g blow to the front of his head. Then, on the very first play of the game, on kickoff, he gets popped in the earhole. It's a 102-g impact. He's part of the wedge." He pointed to the screen, where the player was blocking on a kickoff: "Right here." The player stumbled toward the sideline. "His symptoms were significantly worse than the first injury." Two days later, during an evaluation in Guskiewicz's clinic, he had to have a towel put over his head because he couldn't stand the light. He also had difficulty staying awake. He was sidelined for sixteen days.

When we think about football, we worry about the dangers posed by the heat and the fury of competition. Yet the HITS data suggest that practice—the routine part of the sport—can be as dangerous as the games themselves. We also tend to focus on the dramatic helmet-to-helmet hits that signal an aggressive and reckless style of play. Those kinds of hits can be policed. But what sidelined the U.N.C. player, the first time around, was an accidental and seemingly innocuous elbow, and none of the blows he suffered that day would have been flagged by a referee as illegal. Most important, though, is what Guskiewicz found when he reviewed all the data for the lineman on that first day in training camp. He didn't just suffer those four big blows. He was hit in the head *thirty-one times* that day. What seems to have caused his concussion, in other words, was his cumulative exposure. And why was the second concussion—in the game at Utah—so much more serious than the first? It's not because that hit to the side of the head was especially dramatic; it was that it came after the 76-g blow in warmup, which, in turn, followed the concussion in August, which was itself the consequence of the thirty prior hits that day, and the hits the day before that, and the day before that, and on and on, perhaps back to his high-school playing days.

This is a crucial point. Much of the attention in the football world, in the past few years, has been on concussions—on diagnosing, managing, and preventing them—and on figuring out how many concussions a player can have before he should call it quits. But a football player's real issue isn't simply with repetitive concussive trauma. It is, as the concussion specialist Robert Cantu argues, with repetitive *subconcussive* trauma. It's not just the handful of big hits that matter. It's lots of little hits, too.

That's why, Cantu says, so many of the ex-players who have been given a diagnosis of C.T.E. were linemen: line play lends itself to lots of little hits. The HITS data suggest that, in an average football season, a lineman could get struck in the head a thousand times, which means that a ten-year N.F.L. veteran, when you bring in his college and high-school playing days, could well have been hit in the head eighteen thousand times: that's thousands of jarring blows that shake the brain from front to back and side to side, stretching and weakening and tearing the connections among nerve cells, and making the brain increasingly vulnerable to long-term damage. People with C.T.E., Cantu says, "aren't necessarily people with a high, recognized concussion history. But they are individuals who collided heads on every play—repetitively doing this, year after year, under levels that were tolerable for them to continue to play."

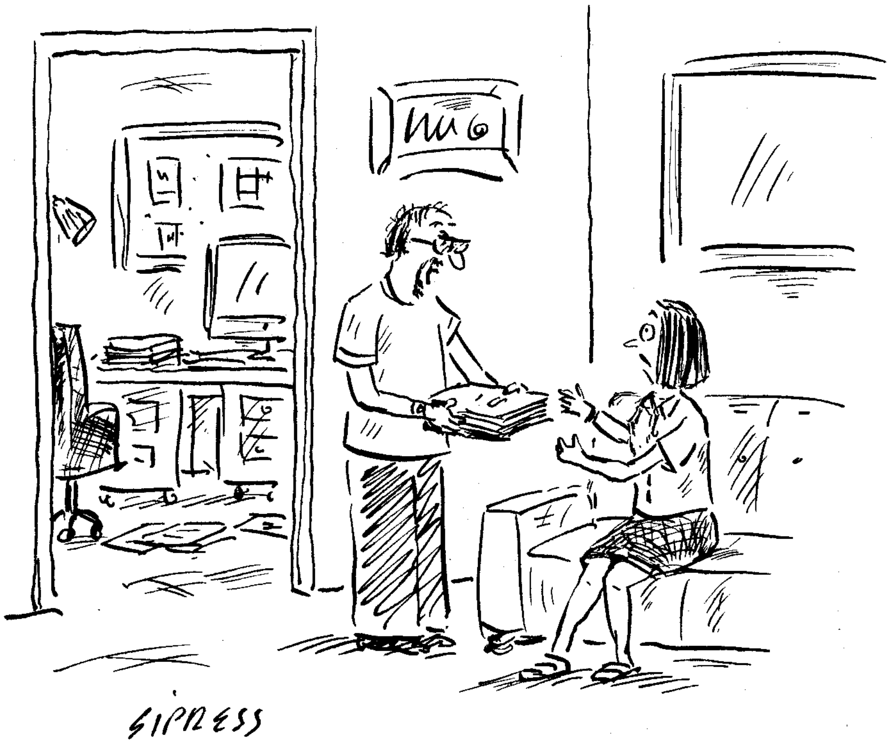
But if C.T.E. is really about lots of little hits, what can be done about it? Turley says that it's impossible for an offensive lineman to do his job without "using his head." The position calls for the player to begin in a crouch and then collide with the opposing lineman when the ball is snapped. Helmet-to-helmet contact is inevitable. Nowinski, who played football for Harvard, says that "proper" tackling technique is supposed to involve a player driving into his opponent with his shoulder. "The problem," he says, "is that, if you're a defender and you're trying to tackle someone and you decide to pick a side, you're giving the other guy a way to go—and people will start running around you." Would better helmets help? Perhaps. And there have been better models introduced that absorb more of the shock from a hit. But, Nowinski says, the better helmets have become—and the more invulnerable they have made the player seem—the more athletes have been inclined to play recklessly.

"People love technological solutions," Nowinski went on. "When I give speeches, the first question is always: 'What about these new helmets I hear about?' What most people don't realize is that we are decades, if not forever, from having a helmet that would fix the problem. I mean, you have two men running into each other at full speed and you think a little bit of plastic and padding could absorb that 150 gs of force?"

At one point, while he was discussing his research, Guskiewicz showed a videotape from a 1997 college football game between Arizona and Oregon. In one sequence, a player from Oregon viciously tackles an Arizona player, bringing his head up onto the opposing player's chin and sending his helmet flying with the force of the blow. To look at it, you'd think that the Arizona player would be knocked unconscious. Instead, he bounces back up. "This guy does not sustain a concussion," Guskiewicz said. "He has a lip laceration. Lower lip, that's it. Now, same game, twenty minutes later." He showed a clip of an Arizona defensive back making a dramatic tackle. He jumps up, and, as he does so, a teammate of his chest-bumps him in celebration. The defensive back falls and hits his head on the ground. "That's a Grade 2 concussion," Guskiewicz said. "It's the fall to the ground, combined with the bounce off the turf."

The force of the first hit was infinitely greater than the second. But the difference is that the first player saw that he was about to be hit and tensed his neck, which limited the sharp back-and-forth jolt of the head that sends the brain crashing against the sides of the skull. In essence, he was being hit not in the head but in the head, neck, and torso—an area with an effective mass three times greater. In the second case, the player didn't see the hit coming. His head took the full force of the blow all by itself. That's why he suffered a concussion. But how do you insure, in a game like football, that a player is never taken by surprise?

Guskiewicz and his colleagues have come up with what they believe is a much better method of understanding concussion. They have done a full cognitive workup of the players on the U.N.C. team, so that they can track whatever effect might arise from the hits each player accumulates during his four years. U.N.C.'s new coach, Butch Davis, has sharply cut back on full-contact practices, reducing the toll on the players' heads. Guskiewicz says his data



"Here it is—my novel. I'll be interested to hear your compliments."

• •

ONE DAY, IN THE PSYCHIC BOOKSTORE
INFORMATION
I'm looking for a certain book with "the" in the title...
There's a, like, guy in it...
I don't remember the author's name.

show that a disproportionate number of serious head impacts happen on kickoffs, so he wonders whether it might make sense, in theory, anyway, to dispense with them altogether. But, like everyone else who's worried about football, he still has no idea what the inherent risks of the game are. What if you did everything you could, and banned kickoffs and full-contact practices and used the most state-of-the-art techniques for diagnosing and treating concussion, and behaved as responsibly as Nascar has in the past several years—and players were still getting too many dangerous little hits to the head?

After the tape session, Guskiewicz and one of his colleagues, Jason Mihalik, went outside to watch the U.N.C. football team practice, a short walk down the hill from their office. Only when you see football at close range is it possible to understand the dimensions of the brain-injury problem. The players were huge—much larger than you imagine them being. They moved at astonishing speeds for people of that size, and, long before you saw them, you heard them: the sound of one two-hundred-and-fifty-pound man colliding with another echoed around the practice facility. Mihalik and Guskiewicz walked over to a small building, just off to the side of the field. On the floor was a laptop inside a black storage crate. Next to the computer was an antenna that received the signals from the sensors inside the players' helmets. Mihalik crouched down and began paging through the data. In one column, the HITS software listed the top hits of the practice up to that point, and every few moments the screen would refresh, reflecting the plays that had just been run on the field. Forty-five minutes into practice, the top eight head blows on the field measured 82 gs, 79 gs, 75 gs, 79 gs, 67 gs, 60 gs, 57 gs, and 53 gs. One player, a running back, had received both the 79 gs and the 60 gs, as well as another hit, measuring 27.9 gs. This wasn't a full-contact practice. It was "shells." The players wore only helmets and shoulder pads, and still there were mini car crashes happening all over the field.

The most damaged, scarred, and belligerent of Michael Vick's dogs—the hardest cases—were sent to the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, on a thirty-seven-hundred-acre spread in the canyons of southern Utah. They were housed in a specially modified octagon, a one-story, climate-controlled cottage, ringed by individual dog runs. The dogs were given a final walk at 11 P.M. and woken up at 7 A.M., to introduce them to a routine. They were hand-fed. In the early months, the staff took turns sleeping in the octagon—sometimes in the middle, sometimes in a cot in one of the runs—so that someone would be with the dogs twenty-four hours a day. Twenty-two of Vick's pit bulls came to Best Friends in January of 2008, and all but five of them are still there.

Ray lunged at his handlers when he first came to Best Friends. He can't be with other dogs. Ellen lies on the ground and wants her stomach scratched, and when the caregivers slept in the octagon she licked them all night long. Her face is lopsided, as if it had been damaged from fighting. She can't be with other dogs, either. Georgia has a broken tail, and her legs and snout are covered with scars. She has no teeth. At some point, in her early life, they had been surgically removed. The court-ordered evaluation of the Vick dogs labelled Meryl, a medium-sized brown-and-white pit-bull mix, "human aggressive," meaning that she is never allowed to be taken out of the Best Friends facility. "She had a hard time meeting people—she would preëmpt anyone coming by charging and snapping at them," Ann Allums, one of the Best Friends dog trainers, said, as she walked around Meryl's octagon, on a recent fall day.

She opened the gate to Meryl's dog run and crouched down on the ground next to her. She hugged the dog, and began playfully wrestling with her, as Meryl's tail thumped happily. "She really doesn't mind new people," Allums said. "She's very happy and loving. I feel totally comfortable with her. I can grab and kiss her." She gave Meryl another hug. "I am building a relationship," she said. "She needed to see that when people were around bad things would not happen."

What happens at Best Friends represents, by any measure, an extravagant gesture. These are dogs that will never live a normal life. But the kind of crime embodied by dogfighting is so morally repellent that it demands an extravagant gesture in response. In a fighting dog, the quality that is prized above all others is the willingness to persevere, even in the face of injury and pain. A dog that will not do that is labelled a "cur," and abandoned. A dog that keeps charging at its opponent is said to possess "gameness," and game dogs are revered.

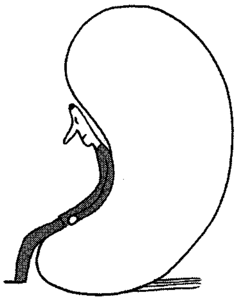
In one way or another, plenty of organizations select for gameness. The Marine Corps does so, and so does medicine, when it puts young doctors through the exhausting rigors of residency. But those who select for gameness have a responsibility not to abuse that trust: if you have men in your charge who would jump off a cliff for you, you cannot march them to the edge of the cliff—and dogfighting fails this test. Gameness, Carl Semencic argues, in "The World of Fighting Dogs" (1984), is no more than a dog's "desire to please an owner at any expense to itself." The owners, Semencic goes on,

> understand this desire to please on the part of the dog and capitalize on it. At any organized pit fight in which two dogs are really going at each other wholeheartedly, one can observe the owner of each dog changing his position at pit-side in order to be in sight of his dog at all times. The owner knows that seeing his master rooting him on will make a dog work all the harder to please its master.

This is why Michael Vick's dogs weren't euthanized. The betrayal of loyalty requires an act of social reparation.

Professional football players, too, are selected for gameness. When Kyle Turley was knocked unconscious, in that game against the Packers, he returned to practice four days later because, he said, "I didn't want to miss a game." Once, in the years when he was still playing, he woke up and fell into a wall as he got out of bed. "I start puking all over," he recalled. "So I said to my wife, 'Take me to practice.' I didn't want to miss practice." The same season that he was knocked unconscious, he began to have pain in his hips. He received three cortisone shots, and kept playing. At the end of the season, he discovered that he had a herniated disk. He underwent surgery, and four months later was back at training camp. "They put me in full-contact practice from day one," he said. "After the first day, I knew I wasn't right. They told me, 'You've had the surgery. You're fine. You should just fight through it.' It's like you're programmed. You've got to go without question—*I'm a warrior. I can block that out of my mind.* I go out, two days later. Full contact. Two-a-days. My back locks up again. I had reherniated the same disk that got operated on four months ago, and bulged the disk above it." As one of Turley's old coaches once said, "He plays the game as it should be played, all out," which is to say that he put the game above his own well-being.

Turley says he was once in the training room after a game with a young linebacker who had suffered a vicious hit on a kickoff return. "We were in the cold tub, which is, like, forty-five degrees, and he starts passing out. In the cold tub. I don't know anyone who has ever passed out in the cold tub. That's supposed to wake you up. And I'm, like, slapping his face. 'Richie! Wake up!' He said, 'What, what? I'm cool.' I said, 'You've got a concussion. You have to go to the hospital.' He said, 'You know, man, I'm fine.'" He wasn't fine, though. That moment in the cold tub represented a betrayal of trust. He had taken the hit on behalf of his team. He was then left to pass out in the cold tub, and to deal—ten and twenty years down the road—with the consequences. No amount of money or assurances about risk freely assumed can change the fact that, in this moment, an essential bond had been broken. What football must confront, in the end, is not just the problem of injuries or scientific findings. It is the fact that there is something profoundly awry in the relationship between the players and the game.



"Let's assume that Dr. Omalu and the others are right," Ira Casson, who co-chairs an N.F.L. committee on brain injury, said. "What should we be doing differently? We asked Dr. McKee this when she came down. And she was honest, and said, 'I don't know how to answer that.' No one has any suggestions—assuming that you aren't saying no more football, because, let's be honest, that's not going to happen." Casson began to talk about the research on the connection between C.T.E. and boxing. It had been known for eighty years. Boxers ran a twenty-per-cent risk of dementia. Yet boxers continue to box. Why? Because people still go to boxing matches.

"We certainly know from boxers that the incidence of C.T.E. is related to the length of your career," he went on. "So if you want to apply that to football—and I'm not saying it does apply—then you'd have to let people play six years and then stop. If it comes to that, maybe we'll have to think about that. On the other hand, nobody's willing to do this in boxing. Why would a boxer at the height of his career, six or seven years in, stop fighting, just when he's making million-dollar paydays?" He shrugged. "It's a violent game. I suppose if you want to you could play touch football or flag football. For me, as a Jewish kid from Long Island, I'd be just as happy if we did that. But I don't know if the fans would be happy with that. So what else do you do?"

Casson is right. There is nothing else to be done, not so long as fans stand and cheer. We are in love with football players, with their courage and grit, and nothing else—neither considerations of science nor those of morality—can compete with the destructive power of that love.

In "Dogmen and Dogfights," Evans and Forsyth write:

> When one views a staged dog fight between pit bulls for the first time, the most macabre aspect of the event is that the only sounds you hear from these dogs are those of crunching bones and cartilage. The dogs rip and tear at each other; their blood, urine and saliva splatter the sides of the pit and clothes of the handlers. . . . The emotions of the dogs are conspicuous, but not so striking, even to themselves, are the passions of the owners of the dogs. Whether they hug a winner or in the rare case, destroy a dying loser, whether they walk away from the carcass or lay crying over it, their fondness for these fighters is manifest. ♦

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**NEWYORKER.COM**

Multimedia slide show: football and the brain.

POSTSCRIPT

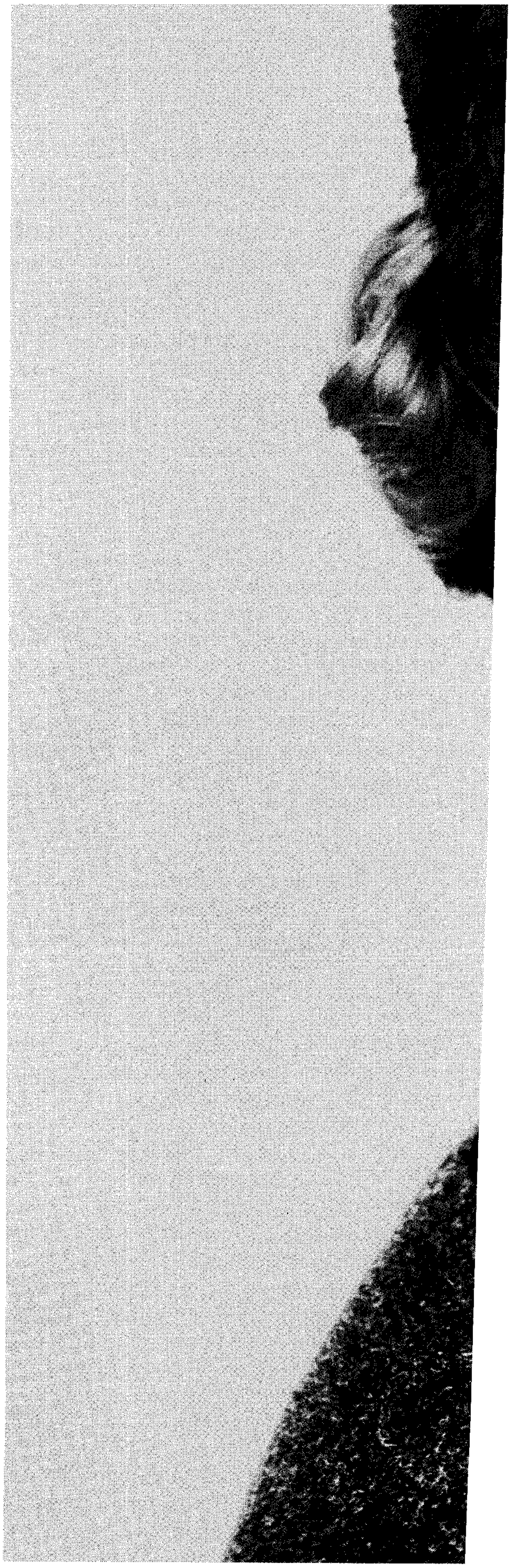
# IRVING PENN

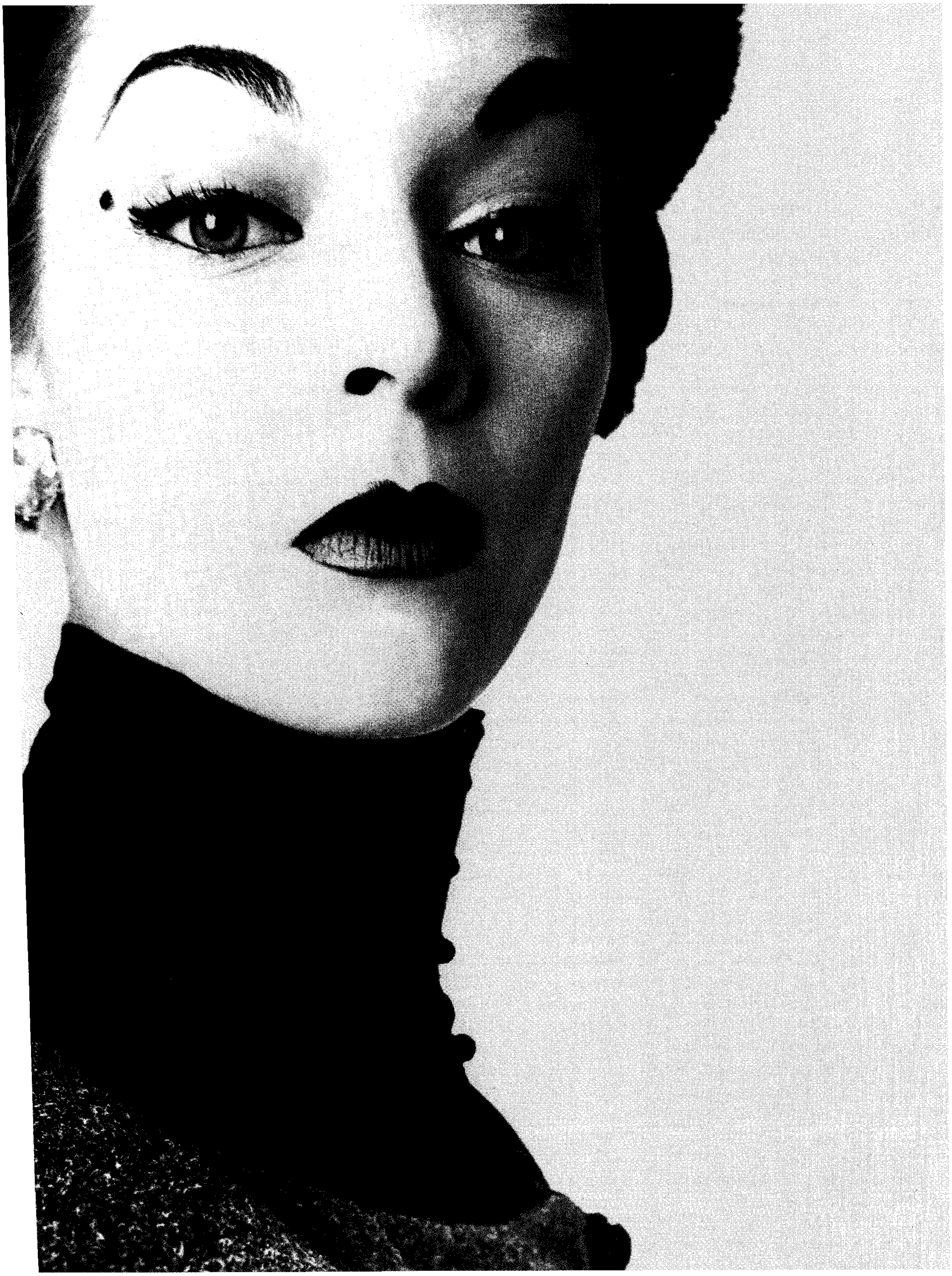
In the postwar years, America was unduly blessed by its art dealers, who offered an open door to the avant-garde, and by its fashion magazines, in which a handful of photographers managed to turn fashion pictures into another kind of high art. Chief among them was Irving Penn, who died last week, at the age of ninety-two. There are many instinctive romantics among popular artists, the Gershwins and the Chaplins who, through force of spirit and originality of style, take by storm the balcony and the boxes alike. Penn was something rarer, an instinctive popular classicist, with a magical gift for visual rhythm, for making something insignificant—a pattern of cigarettes and ashes, each ash miraculously in its one best place—look as formally inevitable as an eighteenth-century still-life. If Richard Avedon, his great rival and competitor, was a snapshot Delacroix, all fire and figures, Penn was Ingres with a Leica, all ravishing edges and perfect composition and a quality of deep color that was the envy of every other photographer.

Yet there was a vein of humane insight in his work, too. He loved showing people caught in corners, and though this was partly a formal device for breaking the fatuous foreground-versus-background opposition of the usual magazine photograph, it also conveyed a quiet edge of claustrophobia, as if his people had been backed into traps of their own devising.

Penn's subject—as in "Woman with Long Black Neck (Jean Patchett)," New York, 1951—is not performance but inner poise, and the dignity of appearances became his central theme. His work is a memorial of a specially privileged era, where the duties of a fashion photographer and the ambitions of an artist could coexist in one serenely realized surface, an age that in retrospect seems to have been one of fine silver, coolly applied.

*—Adam Gopnik*





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### THE PUBLISHING WORLD

# THE GOSSIP MILL

*Alloy, the teen-entertainment factory.*

### BY REBECCA MEAD

When Senator Edward M. Kennedy died, at summer's end, it was inevitable that his extraordinary life would be regarded through the lens of literature. In obituaries, the history of his family was compared to Greek tragedy, and commentators described his accomplishments and his failings as novelistic. Memorializing his departed colleague on the Senate floor, Senator Robert Byrd turned to the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ("Lives of great men all remind us / We can make our lives sublime / And, departing, leave behind us / Footprints on the sands of time"). Meanwhile, at the Manhattan offices of Alloy Entertainment, which produces books and creates other properties for the preteen and teen-age markets, an editorial group was holding a development meeting in a windowless office, pondering the relevance of the Teddy Kennedy story for younger readers. The question under consideration: Could you do Chappaquiddick for kids?

Leslie Morgenstein, the president of Alloy, who is forty-two, was at the head of a conference table. Morgenstein, who bears a passing resemblance to Adam Sandler but is leaner and has darker shadows under his eyes, sat before a counter displaying several of the company's products: "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," "The A-List," "Hollywood Is Like High School with Money," "Gossip Girl." A whiteboard on the wall was scrawled with fragmentary chapter outlines for a historical novel in development, about a boy who acquires superhuman powers after being tortured as a prisoner during the Civil War. At the other end of the table was Josh Bank, the company's executive vice-president, who is forty-one. Between them sat half a dozen female editors and assistants, between the ages of twenty-four and thirty.

One of them, Lanie Davis, was pitching the Kennedy-inspired story. "Three friends grow up in a coastal New England town where a famous political family summers," she said. "Every July Fourth since they were eleven, the friends have gone on a camping trip in the same spot. What they don't realize is that when they were thirteen they were just yards away from a Mary Jo Kopechne-type incident involving the eldest 'Kennedy' brother." The putative story line would be written from the alternating points of view of the three girls, each of whom would see separate clues to the crime which, taken together, would be incriminating. The girls do not discuss what they've seen, and the eldest brother is never charged. A few years later, Davis continued, a local newspaper mentions the girls' annual tradition. "The 'Kennedys' put two and two together and realize the girls were there the night of the crime, and could have seen something," Davis said. "Unbeknownst to our P.O.V. characters, the family sets out to find out if the girls know—and silence them if they do." In addition to this mystery plot, each girl in the novel would have a "front story" involving the political family. The one who'd never had a boyfriend would find herself in a romance with the dashing youngest brother of the clan; the uncool one would forge an unlikely friendship with the family's glamorous daughter. "Part friendship story, part soap, part mystery, we watch as the girls are all seduced by the political family's wealth and power, not realizing the danger they're in," Davis concluded.

Morgenstein, who has an understated, deliberate demeanor, was the first to respond. "I am a little bit off the train with the bunch of coincidences that occur," he said. "They saw something, the family reads about them in a newspaper—that all feels coincidental, and not totally credible." Nonetheless, he said, perhaps the plot could be married with an idea that Josh Bank had mentioned in passing, after having looked up his parents' address on Google Earth and seen a digitized figure, who he thought was himself, walking outside their house. "That's like the contemporary version of 'Blow-Up,' and feels like the way into a modern, cool, psychological thriller, like 'Disturbia,'" Morgenstein said. "And this"—the Kennedy-esque environs of Davis's pitch—"seems like the world to set that in."

"Let's say this family looks at Google Earth and sees on their land a girls-plus-murder kind of thing?" Davis said, uncertainly.

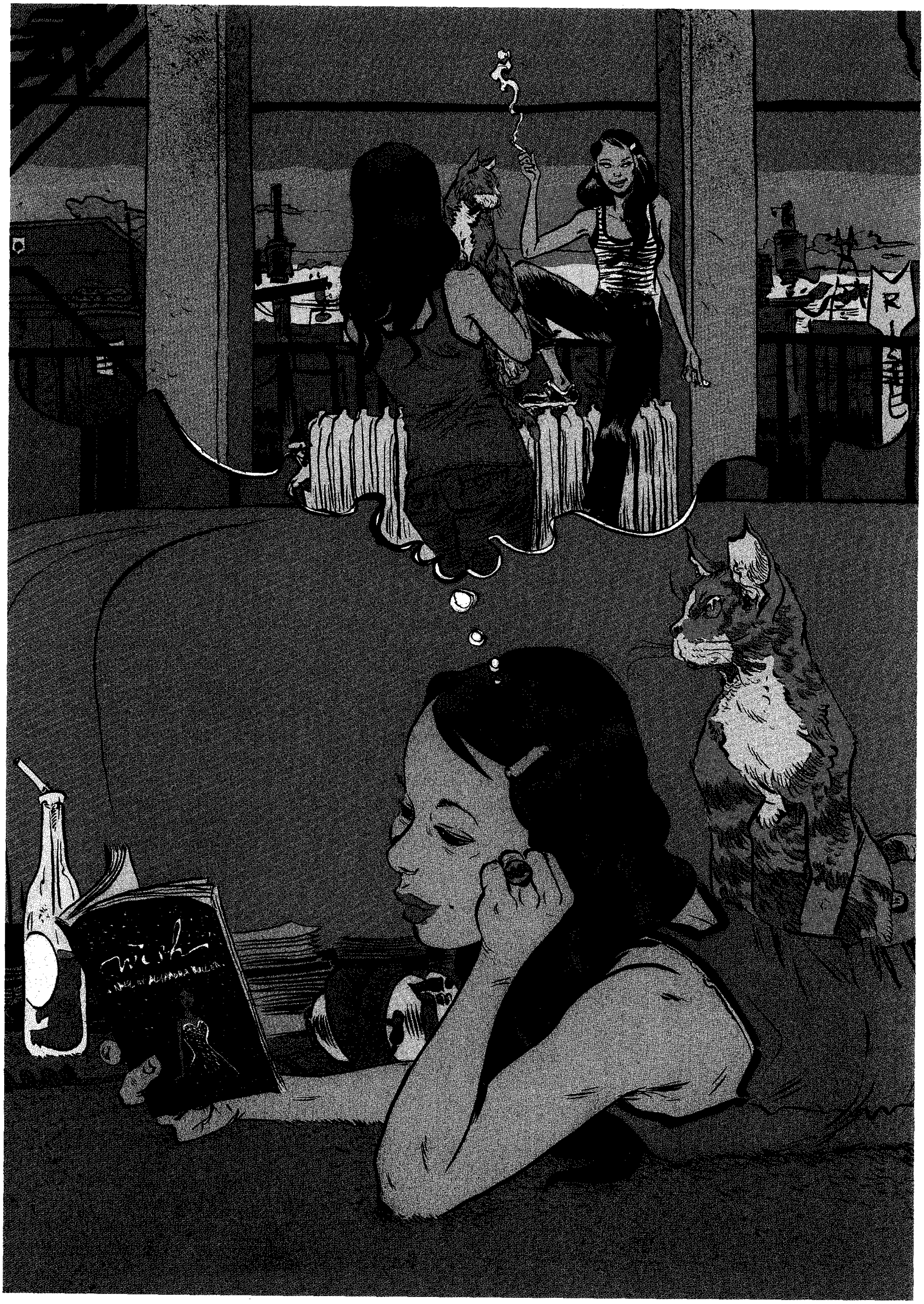
"Since it's from the girls' P.O.V., the girls are probably, like, 'Let's look at our beach house!'" Morgenstein responded. "And then they see something on the neighboring property."

Bank, who is expansive, weighed in from the other end of the table. "Is there a teen political thriller?" he asked, dubiously. "I don't think so."

Morgenstein agreed: "Powerful family is good—the politics of it is not."

Millions of girls have consumed Alloy Entertainment's products, but the company's name does not appear on the spine of its books. Rather, it packages about thirty novels a year for publishers, and also generates television shows and a growing number of ideas for feature films. In order to do all this, Alloy has developed a process with an industrial level of efficiency. Ideas are typically suggested in weekly development meetings and, if they gain the approval of Morgenstein and Bank, are fleshed out into a short summary by an editor. A writer is asked to create a sample chapter on spec; if Alloy executives are happy with the sample, they put her (or, on occasion, him) on contract. The writer hashes out a plot with Bank, one or two other editors, and Sara Shandler, Alloy's editorial director—an alumnus of *Seventeen,* who, at the age of nineteen, put together the anthology "Ophelia Speaks," in which young women respond to the best-selling

PAUL POPE


Wish
A NOVEL BY ALEXANDRA BULLEN

*"Publishers can get hung up on what's good for kids," an editor says. "At Alloy, they always think first about what kids want to read."*

book "Reviving Ophelia." The group spends days brainstorming in the conference room, in the manner of television writers developing a series. The writer then goes off and completes the "first act"—roughly, the first ten chapters of the book. When the first act is in good shape, it is sent to potential publishers.

This week's development meeting was focussed on current events. Shandler offered a pitch inspired by the Jaycee Dugard abduction case, which had been receiving hours of coverage on CNN. In Shandler's scenario, a teen-ager who is returned to her family thirteen years after being kidnapped isn't who she claims to be. "I can take it in a thriller direction, or a horror direction," Shandler offered. Davis suggested another story line, inspired by the recent death of the investor Finn Caspersen. The idea involved the suicide of a financier and the subsequent feuding among his bereaved family: his two daughters; his new young wife, who is also the former best friend of one of the daughters; and a never acknowledged illegitimate son. Morgenstein made his own pitch, a swine-flu-meets-"Lord of the Flies" scenario, in which only a hundred young people survive a pandemic. "I'm eager to use the title 'The Hundred,' which I've been pitching now for ten years," he said.

Bank suggested spinning a story line out of the ongoing cartel violence in Mexico: a pampered rich girl has to rescue her kidnapped parents. "It's a reverse 'Taken' "—the 2008 movie starring Liam Neeson—"or a dark, grounded 'Nancy Drew,' " he explained.

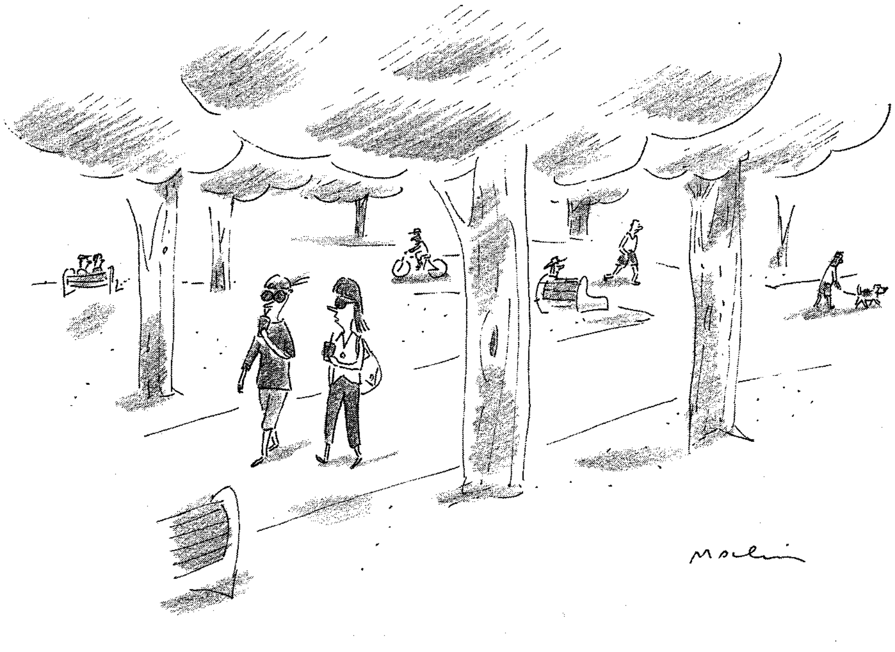
"A young, female Jason Bourne could be interesting," Morgenstein said.

Davis then returned to political themes, reporting that an absent colleague had suggested a clever book title: "Malia Stole My Lunch Money." As Davis explained, "What if President Obama's daughter wasn't adorable and charming but a brat and a bully? And what if you were running against her for seventh-grade class president?" Everyone laughed at this idea, but the consensus was that the Obama girls were untouchable. (Bank fondly recalled one of his unused pitches from an earlier era, titled "I Did the President's Daughter": "A guy goes out to a bar one night, meets a girl, he's drunk, she's drunk—like 'Knocked Up'—and the next day he realizes, 'Holy crap, I slept with the President's daughter, and she's really into me,' and he has to get a lecture from the President.")

Not every pitch was related to the headlines. "Is there a way to do 'Marley & Me' for teen girls?" Bank asked, toward the end of the meeting. "Bittersweet ending, sad, but about dogs?"

"That feels very generic," Morgenstein replied. "I'm sure every publishing house has a couple of versions of that."

"But name one," Bank insisted. "The 'Sisterhood' version, with dog."



*"If I married him, it would only encourage him."*

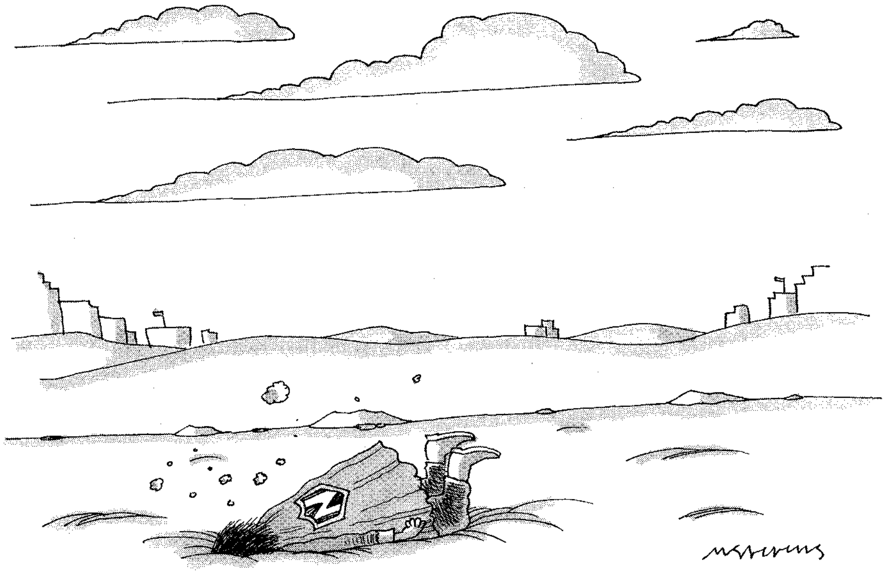
"I pitched one a while ago with a girl and a dog solving crimes—'Girl's Best Friend,' " Shandler said.

Bank looked dismissive. "I just don't know the thing that is similar to my idea," he said. "Girl and dog. I think we should look into it."

Last year, eighteen of Alloy's twenty-nine new titles hit the *Times* children's best-seller list. Elise Howard, the associate publisher for fiction in the children's division of HarperCollins, says of the Alloy executives, "They have a no-holds-barred approach to giving readers exactly what they want to find." Howard has published a hundred books with Alloy, including the best-selling mystery series "Pretty Little Liars," by Sara Shepard, which chronicles the lives of four girls after their clique's leader has mysteriously vanished. (Her body is ultimately found encased in cement, in her family's back yard.) "Editors and publishers can get hung up on what's good for kids," Howard told me. "At Alloy, they always think first about what kids want to read."

Not every Alloy proposal finds a publisher: an idea for a book called "Sparkalicious" has so far failed to sell. "Two girls spend their whole lives working to get into their dream schools, and they finally get in, but they have no idea what to do, so they get really high and go on a crazy adventure," Bank explained. "It was really 'Harold & Kumar,' or 'Superbad,' for girls, but people had a hard time with the pot use." (Alloy is now repackaging it as a movie pitch.) Occasionally, the Alloy team finds an idea that's so irresistible it generates a book proposal even when a huge audience is unlikely to materialize. "You Are *So* Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah!," an account of the coming-of-age trials of Stacy Friedman and her misplaced affection for one Andy Goldfarb—a classmate who speaks in hip-hop slang, and whose belt buckle reads "G-Farb"—sold only modestly for its publisher, Hyperion.

The company's main goal, however, is to produce blockbusters. It is the belief at Alloy that what kids want to read is not so different from what adults want to read, and many Alloy books have their genesis in successful grownup entertainment reworked for a younger audience. The "Pretty Little Liars" series, for example, was conceived as "'Desperate Housewives' for teens." (It has sold more than eight hundred thousand copies.) Sometimes Alloy will recalibrate a teen success for an even younger audience. A current project in development is "The Zombie Chasers," a book series aimed at nine-to-twelve-year-olds, which Elise Howard commissioned for HarperCollins after observing her teen-age son's fascination with stories of the undead, and realizing that there was almost no zombie literature for younger readers. "I talked to a number of editors and agents, and I said, 'I want "Shaun of the Dead" for tweens, or zombies for tweens,' and Alloy were the ones who came back and delivered exactly what I had been hoping for," she says. The book, by John Kloepfer, is to be published in the summer of 2010, and is illustrated by Steve Wolfhard with cheery cartoon images of decomposing corpses.



THE ADVENTURES OF NORMALMAN

In the middle of this decade, one of the things that kids most wanted to read was the "Gossip Girl" series. "Gossip Girl," the name of which was suggested by an Alloy intern, had its genesis in a development meeting in early 2000, and is written in the voice of an anonymous blogger who chronicles the antics of students at élite New York private schools. The focus is on their sentimental rather than on their formal educations: sex, drugs, and alcohol are an essential part of the "Gossip Girl" curriculum. The first book was published in 2002, and was written by Cecily von Ziegesar, who at the time was an Alloy editor and an old hand at the writing-by-committee method. (Von Ziegesar recalls plotting out a now forgotten series that featured a baby with evil powers. Her contribution to the conference-room brainstorming included screaming, "Gouge the baby's eyes out! Gouge the baby's eyes out!") With "Gossip Girl," von Ziegesar created a deft caricature of teen-age self-involvement seen through the lens of excessive wealth and absent morality. The first book begins with a dinner party at the penthouse apartment of the antiheroine, Blair Waldorf, which "had been expensively redecorated that summer in deep reds and chocolate browns, and . . . was full of antiques and artworks that would have impressed anyone who knew anything about art. . . . In the kitchen, Myrtle the cook was singing Bob Marley songs to the soufflé, and the sloppy Irish maid, Esther, hadn't poured Scotch down anyone's dress yet, thank God."

There have been twelve "Gossip Girl" books so far, although several of the later ones were only "created" by von Ziegesar, who oversaw the work of a ghostwriter while also "creating" another ghostwritten series, "The It Girl," a best-selling "Gossip Girl" spinoff set in an upstate boarding school. (A thirteenth "Gossip Girl" volume, also not von Ziegesar's composition, will be published in November.) So far, more than five and a half million "Gossip Girl" books have been sold, and a TV show, on the CW network, is in its third season. Morgenstein, who has two sons, aged thirteen and ten, says that when the "Gossip Girl" show began airing, parents at his sons' Upper East Side private school—especially parents with daughters—were horrified. Success seems to have dispelled the opprobrium, however, and these days he is more likely to be asked to donate, for a school silent auction, a visit to the set of the series.

Morgenstein hasn't even read all the "Gossip Girl" books—he stopped after editing the first couple—but for several years Alloy mined the "Gossip Girl" vein. "The A-List," about a group of students at a Beverly Hills high school, is "Gossip Girl" in Los Angeles. "Private," about a group of girls in an exclusive dormitory, is "Gossip Girl" at boarding school. "The Insiders," about a gang of male high schoolers who live in downtown Manhattan, is "Gossip Girl" with boys. Not every derivative has worked—"Hotlanta," which was "Gossip Girl" with African-Americans, failed to find an audience—but others have paid off richly. "The Clique," a series about a group of nasty middle schoolers in a wealthy Westchester County suburb, is "Gossip Girl" for tweens, and has sold more than eight million copies. When, in 2006, the company brought to market a series called "The Luxe"—"Gossip Girl" set in the Gilded Age—the competition among publishers was such that one sent its offer in the hands of a footman, dressed in period costume and carrying a rose. The four-book series went to HarperCollins, for a mid-six-figure sum per book. (In total, the first three books have sold more than four hundred thousand copies.)

A proposal package from Alloy contains not only the first act of a book; it also includes a proposed cover image and a document known as the "what comes next"—a detailed summary of the subsequent two acts. (The books almost invariably have a three-part structure.) For "The Luxe," editors so liked the cover mockup—a photograph, torn from a bridal magazine, that showed a girl with cascading locks wearing a billowing pink satin gown with a strapless bodice—that the Alloy team reproduced the image, more or less exactly, for the book-cover photo shoot. The result is a look that no woman in the Gilded Age would have been immodest enough to wear beyond the boudoir or the brothel, though the Alloy team felt that the sartorial anachronism was entirely forgivable (much like the heroine's request for "ciggies"—slang that would take another sixty years to emerge). "Girls today would not relate to the more severe necklines and covered arms and horrible hair styles that girls were wearing at the time," Sara Shandler says. "We tried to do the imaginary-princess version." Or, as one of the publishers competing for the book described the gown, "the ultimate fuck-you prom dress."

## A HISTORY OF ORIGAMI

two women in three days
cried on the green bench in the park
where i found a dollar
folded into a boat.

i thought it was the crying bench and cried
on the crying bench
when it became available.

i cried
by thinking of all the people
who've never broken a shop window, not the baker's
window, the bead-seller's,
who sells beads for purposes
i find hard to list: necklaces,
the hanging of strings of beads
in doorways, the owning of beads
just in case.

breaking a shop window with a piece of shale
the size of my heart, a piece of shale
on which i've drawn my heart, not my actual heart
but my feelings of my heart,
since i've never seen my heart,
would set something free.

i don't know what that something is
but it would be free.

and my heart would have survived its travels
through glass, its jagged voyage
through my reflection.

you see now why i cried: none of this is real.

Even before the financial crash of last fall, the sales of "Gossip Girl" books had levelled off, and since then they have declined—in part because "fans are getting their 'Gossip Girl' in other places," as Morgenstein puts it, but also because the books' milieu is less beguiling, and less relevant, than it once seemed to be. At Alloy, too, a certain weariness with brat lit has set in. "We are really a little sick of mean-girl stuff," Shandler says.

The Alloy team knows at least one thing that today's girls want to read: anything by Stephenie Meyer. The author, who has never worked with Alloy, is known for the "Twilight" series, about Bella Swan, a gloomy misfit girl, and her problematic romance with a sensitive vampire named Edward Cullen. Last year alone, twenty-seven and a half million Meyer books were sold in the U.S.—seven per cent of all young-adult sales. Meyer's success largely explains why sales of children's books are likely to be up five per cent this year, whereas adult trade publishing is experiencing diminishing revenues. (Albert Greco, a marketing professor at Fordham University who studies the book industry, projects a decline of four per cent this year, even after the stimulus provided by Dan Brown.)

"Forbidden love is a lot of what's behind 'Twilight,'" Morgenstein says. "It's about longing and lust, but it's not about sex, and that's very powerful to younger teen girls." It is for this reason that Morgenstein has for years resisted one of Josh Bank's pitches, "Mini Vampires," aimed at younger kids. "Vampires are sexy and dangerous and romantic, and, if they're mini, they're none of those things," Morgenstein says. ("I still think it could work," Bank insists, imagining the merchandising opportunities: "It sounds like a breakfast cereal! 'Mom, can I have some more Mini Vampires?'")

Shandler says, "More serious, angsty literature is where girls are right now. Morbid, dead-girl lit." Alloy's next offering in this genre is a book called "Wish," which is to be published by Scholastic in January. The heroine of "Wish," Olivia Larsen, is a withdrawn seventeen-year-old in San Francisco whose outgoing twin sister, Violet, has recently died. Through the ministrations of Posey, an irascible, supernatural seamstress who provides her with a magical dress, Olivia is able to bring Violet back to life, at least temporarily. The dead twin, who is visible only to her sister, has a dry wit. When Violet first reappears, she is on a fire escape, smoking. "One of the perks," she says. "Cigarettes can't kill you if you're already dead."

The book had an unusually long gestation. Initially, Shandler says, the editorial team had decided that Olivia's drive was to seek popularity in school, but ultimately they agreed that such a preoccupation was implausible, under the circumstances. "We realized that Olivia is

until i can answer yes to the cop who asks, is this your heart
among the ruins of your reflection?
i won't be a man, despite what my anatomy
insists.

it insists
that i overcome a sense of resistance when i move,
that i move
as long as i am able to move, and when i am unable
to move, that i stop.

it would be free and look like a bird, an actual bird
or a dollar folded into a bird, a dollar bird
in a dollar boat.

which is to say
i believe origami arrives
when we need it most.

i can't prove this but i can't prove
you're a good person though i suspect
you're a good person.

you who opened the door.

you who tipped your hat.

you who ran into the fire and carried
the fire safely out.

*—Bob Hicok*

not looking to be popular—she is looking to be a whole person," Shandler says. "You don't care about being popular if you've lost your twin sister." This more emotionally textured plot, however, was harder to hammer out within the established Alloy framework. " 'I want to be O.K.'—it's not great motivation, it's not a great drive," Shandler says. "It's hard to put that into cover copy." The final form of "Wish" might be characterized as "The Lovely Bones" for kids, and Shandler says that, compared with other Alloy offerings, the new series "has more of a literary bent, and some hopefulness and wish fulfillment in an emotional way, not in an 'I want that Gucci bag' way." The book is certainly a tearjerker, though there are also many, many descriptions of the characters' dresses, boots, and skinny jeans.

The author of "Wish" is Alexandra Bullen, a twenty-seven-year-old graduate of New York University's drama-writing program. It is her first novel, and in August she spent a few days at the Alloy offices with Shandler, Bank, and another editor, Joelle Hobeika, figuring out the story line of "Wish 2," which Scholastic plans to publish in 2011. Three weeks before the plotting meetings, Shandler had e-mailed Bullen a short characterization of the direction in which the team had been thinking of taking the book: "What might happen to a girl who says, I wish I had a different life. And then she wakes up, and she actually has one." Bullen had replied, "I love it! Such a great place to start! Can't wait to come and hash it out with you guys!"

Bullen arrived in the conference room with a laptop and the kernel of an idea: What if the girl's wish was really about having different parents? The team batted around several ways of approaching this theme, with the author taking notes. What if the girl comes from a messed-up but wealthy family and wants a simpler life? Or what if she has a single mom, whom she is hard on, because the mom is hard on her? What if her parents forced the family to move all the time? What if her mom was a famous something or other—always on a book tour or the talk-show circuit—and the girl feels that she's expected to be a manager rather than a daughter? Could the mom be a conservative Dr. Laura figure who tries out her theories on her reluctant daughter? Or maybe the mom had made some mistakes in her own life, from which she is trying to protect her daughter?

After a couple of hours, Bullen said, "I have a crazy idea. What if she went back in time and met her mom as a younger woman, so we understand why she's the way she is?" The team jumped at this idea, and by early afternoon had nailed down the rough outlines of the book's three-act structure. Act I: A girl, Hazel, who has grown up being bounced around among foster families, decides, as soon as she is eighteen, to track down her birth mother. She finds a name, Googles it, and discovers that her birth mother is hosting a benefit in San Francisco. Unable to reach her any other way, she flies to the city—where she gets a dress from Posey, the magical dressmaker—and shows up at the benefit, only to discover that the woman she seeks was killed in a car accident a week earlier. Devastated by the news, Hazel says that she wishes she'd had the chance to get to know her mother. When she wakes up the next morning, she discovers that it is 1993, the year of her birth, and she's in Martha's Vineyard. Act II: She gets a job on the farm of the woman she believes to be her mother, who is pregnant, apparently with her; she also becomes friends with Katie, a girl her own age, who is also working on the farm. Midway into Act II—a pivotal point in Alloy books—the pregnant farm owner has a miscarriage, meaning

"I'd run it by legal myself, but they have a restraining order against me."

• •

that she cannot be Hazel's mom after all. Meanwhile, a teary Katie admits to Hazel that she is pregnant, and Hazel realizes that her co-worker is actually her mom-to-be.

The content of the book—unplanned pregnancy, miscarriage, death—seemed likely to arouse controversy, and certain issues would have to be handled with extreme care. Morgenstein and the team discussed the idea of Katie visiting Planned Parenthood. "I think at Planned Parenthood you're going to have to deal with the 'Is she going to have an abortion?' stuff pretty quickly," Shandler said.

"She's too far along," Hobeika said, definitively.

"She's, like, 'I know I'm going to have the baby, but I don't know if I'm going to keep it or give it up for adoption,'" Shandler agreed.

"And then maybe the rest of Act II could be Hazel thinking she's trying to convince Katie to keep the baby," Bullen suggested.

"How can she convince her?" Shandler asked.

"She would be doing things like going and looking at baby bonnets with her," Hobeika offered.

"A great second act," Bank said, sardonically. "Readers will be, like, 'My God, that scene in the baby store!'"

"Maybe the second half of the second act is really less about trying to convince Katie to keep the baby, and more about her realizing that Katie, this person she's just getting to know as her best friend, is really her mom," Sandler suggested. "And about really getting to know her mom, now that she has the opportunity."

"I like that," Bank said. "I keep thinking about 'Dirty Dancing'—I don't know why. It's the idea of a family that isn't a family. Our girl Hazel has never really had a family, and this farm family becomes her family, and Katie becomes a mom-ish best friend, in a way."

"They are raising each other," Shandler said.

"I like that a lot," the author said.

Bank suggested that Katie could be "somewhat of a nemesis up until the midpoint of the book."

"That's really interesting," Shandler said.

Hobeika said, "That increases her drive to get to know her mother in the second half of the second act—"

"They have been competing over a boy! Her dad!" Bank said, before quickly adding that he was kidding.

"God, no. It's an off-island boyfriend," Bullen said, emphatically.

"That's one thing we have to steer this away from—the creepy Michael J. Fox 'Back to the Future' thing of flirting with your mom," Bank said. "We're not in that business."

The business of packaging books for kids was invented a little more than a century ago by Edward Stratemeyer, an author and entrepreneur, who got his start writing boys' stories for the magazine *Golden Days*, in the eighteen-eighties, before launching his own adventure series, "The Rover Boys," in 1899. Stratemeyer's innovation was to produce books that were intended to entertain rather than to instruct, as was more typical of children's literature at the time. The series, which was published under the pseudonym Arthur M. Winfield, begins when three Rover brothers, Tom, Dick, and Sam, are sent off to a military academy for misbehaving at home. "We have been going it pretty strong lately, with playing tricks on Sarah the cook, Jack the hired man, and Uncle Randolph's pet dog Alexander," Sam, the youngest Rover, says on the book's first page.

By 1910, Stratemeyer had formed a corporation called the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which was a kids'-books production line: he would make an outline, hire a ghostwriter to write the book to order, then polish the work to conform to his preferred style, before handing it off to a publisher. The books—which went on to include the "Hardy Boys" series, launched in 1927, and the "Nancy Drew" mysteries, launched in 1930—were all published under pseudonyms, with Stratemeyer maintaining ownership of the copyright. After his death, in 1930, Stratemeyer's daughter, Harriet, continued to produce books according to the same fundamental model until her own death, in 1982. (In 1984, Simon & Schuster acquired the syndicate, and a few years ago Nancy Drew was reimagined as a girl detective who texts friends and is *au fait* with fashion magazines.)

In the early eighties, other publishers began to see new commercial possibilities in book series for kids and teens. Dan Weiss, an editor who had worked at Golden Books and at Scholastic, felt that teen girls had an appetite for romance books that was not being satisfied. He started his own packaging company with a series called "Sweet Dreams"—essentially, Harlequin romances for kids.

"I knew what I wanted, and I wanted to craft what I wanted," Weiss says. "I wanted Ivory Soap to be Ivory Soap every time." Weiss teamed up with Bantam, the mass-market paperback imprint, and soon had an enormous success with "Sweet Valley High," a series about the twin Wakefield sisters—one naughty, one nice. (There were ultimately more than five hundred titles in the franchise.) The scenario was conceived by Francine Pascal, and her name went on all the books, but the actual writing was farmed out to a succession of workers for hire. "Sweet Valley High" alumnae include Cecily von Ziegesar, who once knocked off one of the books in a weekend.

Leslie Morgenstein went to work for Dan Weiss immediately after graduating from Sarah Lawrence, in 1989. Weiss encouraged him to take night courses at N.Y.U.'s Stern School of Business, and Morgenstein did, receiving an M.B.A. in 1997. Three years later, he bought the company from Weiss, in partnership with Ann Brashares, the editorial director at the time. Shortly thereafter, the company was acquired by Alloy Media and Marketing, which promoted youth events, orchestrated online marketing aimed at teens, and sold clothing and other products to teens. These days, Alloy Media and Marketing is the owner of Teen.com, a popular Web site that heavily promotes Alloy Entertainment products; it also owns Channel 1, the in-school television news network created by Chris Whittle, which means that it can broadcast commercials for Alloy properties to a captive teen audience numbering in the millions.

By the time Morgenstein took over the company, the "Sweet Valley High" phenomenon had run its course, and young-adult publishing was in a slump relative to other media. "The press was spending a lot of time talking about Generation Y, and there was *Teen People*, the WB network, the boy bands," he recalls. "But the teen book market wasn't performing at all. The product needed to catch up to other forms of entertainment." The once-a-month "Sweet Valley High" model seemed outdated. "We thought consumers were more sophisticated," Morgenstein says. "They wanted their book to feel like Mom's book—to be printed on decent paper, with a cover that looked like it didn't have to come from the kids' section, didn't have a number on it, and wasn't embarrassing to be seen with."

Economic aspects of the "Sweet Valley High" model have been superseded, too. Rather than providing services for a fixed fee, as "Sweet Valley High" writers did, Alloy authors generally own a fifty-per-cent stake in their work; the terms can be more favorable in the case of a writer who is a proven best-seller, or less favorable when the writer is a novice. Crucially, though, Alloy retains the intellectual-property rights to all the work, with a view to generating a movie or a TV show from the same title. (Authors share in revenue generated from the rights, but Alloy gets the producer's credit, which, over time, can be worth a great deal more.) Alloy's writers are usually in their twenties, and often have little or no experience writing a full-length novel. In 2006, one Alloy author, a nineteen-year-old Harvard student named Kaavya Viswanathan, was accused of plagiarizing many passages in her book, "How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life," from the works of another young-adult author. The books were pulped, and Viswanathan's contract for a second book was cancelled. At the time, Morgenstein admits, he thought it was "tremendously clever" to work with a teenage author, but Alloy's policy now is not to do business with minors.

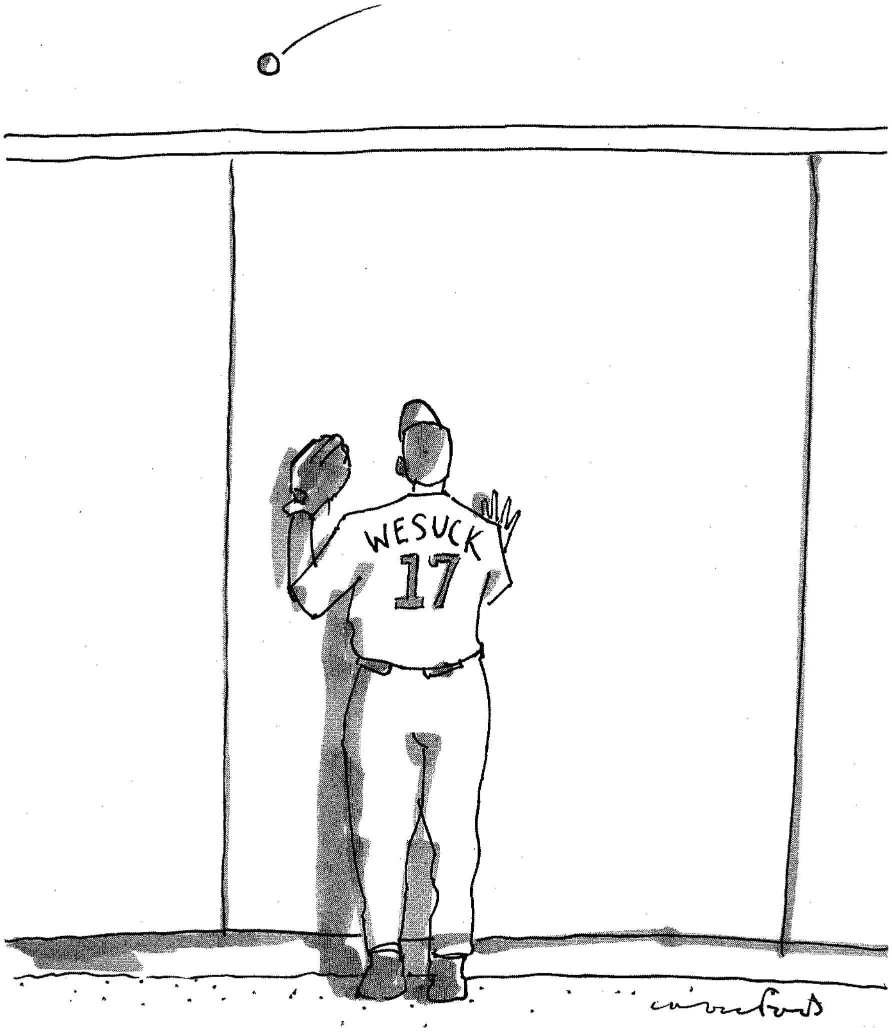
Initially, Morgenstein maintained the option of using company-owned pseudonyms, with some success. "Private," officially by Kate Brian, is by a writer named Kieran Viola, who also publishes under her own name. Zoey Dean, the supposed author of the "A-List" books—who, according to her publisher-issued biography, "divides her time between Beverly Hills and several small islands in the Caribbean"—is actually a front for six ghostwriters, including a husband-and-wife team. But Morgenstein has begun to consider author anonymity a liability. It is difficult to get a nonexistent author to blog or tweet, let alone make author appearances. By comparison, Lisi Harrison, the author of the "Clique" series, gets upward of a thousand responses to her weekly blog entries. Readers gush about her brilliance in Clique-speak ("I love your books lisi! Your an ah-mazing writer!"), plan hypothetical fan get-togethers ("I think it would be toh-tally awesome if Lisi held like a idk . . . like a party kinda thing or w/e . . . so we could all finally meet each other!"; "i think it

*"And because of this one, human indiscretion, the man and his wife never trusted each other fully again."*

should either be in cali or texas because these are some of the biggest states. but think bout it—would ur parents really let you fly half way across the country?"), and post their own fan fiction featuring Massie Block, the vile antiheroine of the series, Claire Lyons, her dorky nemesis, and other characters. ("Okay whatevs," Massie said. "Look Kuh-lair, what you said back there was pretty biotchy but Alicia and i forgive you.")

Some writers have their own qualms about putting their names on Alloy books. As Shandler says, "A lot of people who hope to write the Great American Novel under their own name aren't sure they want to start their career writing books for twelve-year-olds." But the potential benefits of becoming recognized as a best-selling author are substantial, even if much of the profit goes to Alloy. Cecily von Ziegesar, who is discussing with Morgenstein and Bank the possibility of doing a "Gossip Girl" sequel, which would revisit the characters a decade later, is also completing her first novel written, and sold, independently of Alloy. Von Ziegesar has mixed feelings about her reputation as an author of books that even girls who don't like to read like to read. "I want girls who *love* to read to read them," she says. But sharing the ownership of the "Gossip Girl" books does not upset her: "It was very much a collaborative thing, and I don't begrudge them that at all."

Other authors have a more qualified view of the arrangement. Ann Brashares, whose four "Traveling Pants" novels have sold more than nine million copies in the U.S., says that, while the idea for that book was hashed out in committee, she was left to develop the plot and the characters in relative solitude, as she preferred to do. "They took a huge share of the money," she told me. "And if I wanted to do all the work, that was O.K.—they gave me that." Brashares, who left the company in 2001, is obliged to write two more books with Alloy. "I'm trying to separate from them amicably," she said. "I'm writing my way out of it."



The brainstorming sessions at Alloy's offices, Brashares says, stimulated creativity. "We did things in a very collaborative way, and there was a lot of freedom, and ideas would flow, and one of the nice things was that you said what you thought and you didn't worry about guarding it," she recalls. "But, when faced with the actual sentence-by-sentence unfolding of a novel or a story, I can't see how you can do that in a way that involves a lot of voices at the same time." The limitations of the Alloy method are visible even to its most accomplished practitioners. "We don't have literary aims, by and large," Josh Bank says. "It would be nice to have a couple of literary aims. I would like to do more experimental stuff. You can't group-plot 'Harry Potter.' Well, you could, but it wouldn't be 'Harry Potter.' "

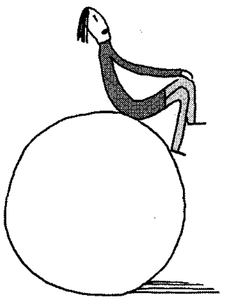
Morgenstein still believes in the transformative power of books: his own career as a reader began when he was about to go to college and his sister gave him a copy of Jay McInerney's "Bright Lights, Big City." He says, "I read that book, and I didn't stop reading for four years." He once hoped to be a writer himself, and studied for an M.F.A. at CUNY; for his thesis, he completed a collection of short stories, which remains unpublished.

Morgenstein has much less confidence in the economic power of books. "I do fundamentally believe that publishing is not an expanding business," he says. "It is contracting—even our corner of it, which has been very vibrant in the past few years. I don't think long term there's going to be sustainable growth there." As a result, the Alloy executives spend as much time thinking about ideas for television and movies as they do for books, and consider their book ideas in terms of their viability as television and film franchises.

Some television shows have already been spun off from books: "Gossip Girl" was followed by a short-lived series called "Privileged," and NBC has just bought a show based on "Midnighters," a series of books about crime-fighting kids. Morgenstein and his team are increasingly looking to Hollywood, where the company has a small but growing office, led by Bob Levy. Alloy has an exclusive development deal with Warner Bros. Television, and its products have already generated a handful of movies, including two based on “The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants,” which have grossed more than eighty million dollars. More recently, there was “Sex Drive,” a movie based on “All the Way,” a book for teen boys; it bombed at the box office, to the great disappointment of Morgenstein and Levy, who were lead producers on the film. “I think a lot of it had to do with the title,” Bank says. “It’s one thing for a twenty-five-year-old guy to say, ‘Honey, do you want to go and see “Superbad”?’ And his girlfriend will say, ‘That sounds great.’ ‘Honey, do you want to go and see “Sex Drive”?’ Not so great.”

Morgenstein says that the company has expanded its focus to include developing more family-oriented fare for film. One idea under discussion is a comedy about a Texas steer that somehow finds itself transported to Bollywood. “My add was that the cow was like George Bush,” Bank told me. “He’s not the world’s brightest cow—he’s very pro-American. He is this well-taken-care-of steer and lives this fabulous cowboy life in Texas, and then he realizes one day he is being fattened for slaughter. He gets to India—we haven’t figured out how—where he is revered as a god. Then there’s a second act that’s all about cultural misunderstanding.”

Alloy Entertainment is also developing digital programming to be shown directly on Teen.com. This summer, the site launched a Web series, “Private”: twenty episodes of four to six minutes each, all sponsored by Johnson & Johnson products, in a manner similar to the way that Procter & Gamble used to underwrite soap operas. (There has been unsubtle product placement. The heroine—a scholarship student at a boarding school—sleeps with a box of O.B. tampons on her bedside table.) The digital experiment was a success—the show received more than thirteen million unique views, exceeding commitments to the sponsor—and Alloy is looking to apply the model to other books on its backlist. “The scale is much smaller than a TV series, but we’re financing it, so if it works it will be something that is really, really valuable,” Morgenstein explains. It is increasingly unimportant to Alloy whether an idea ever appears in book form: although it can be useful to demonstrate to a network or a studio that a title already has traction in the marketplace, developing a book is time-consuming, whereas an idea for television can be pitched and sold within weeks. “We are both ready to and need to step away from what our traditional model was,” he says.



In September, the CW network began airing “The Vampire Diaries,” Alloy’s latest venture into non-literary entertainment, and the result of one of the first pitches that Morgenstein ever made, for a book series to be called “Teen Dracula.” (“Vampires have enduring popularity in movies and fiction,” the original pitch document, from 1989, says. “For the first time, ‘Teen Dracula’ takes this phenomena to juvenile series fiction.”) That pitch contributed to the creation, in 1991, of a trilogy called “The Vampire Diaries,” by L. J. Smith, which centered on a popular blond high-school student who inspires romantic competition between two vampire brothers. The series did so well that a fourth book was added a year later. “It was Anne Rice for kids,” Dan Weiss says.

The books sold well for several years, then lost popularity as the “Gossip Girl” wave flooded the kids’ market with shopping-and-hooking-up novels. But, with the phenomenal success of “Twilight,” the “Vampire Diaries” franchise has been dusted off. The first four books have been rereleased, and last winter saw the publication of a fifth installment, which bears the Meyeresque title “The Return: Nightfall.” Editors at Alloy recently received an eight-hundred-page manuscript from Smith, which will have been whittled down into a publishable sixth book by next year. “For us, ‘Vampire Diaries’ has been a pretty big book success,” Morgenstein says. “But if the show is successful that will be many, many times more profitable for us than the books.”

On the evening of the show’s première, the Alloy editorial team gathered at a bar called Jock Tamson’s Bairns, on Second Avenue, in the Eighties. Josh Bank was there with his wife, Lissy, fielding text messages from Cecily von Ziegesar, who was tied up at a “Gossip Girl” event downtown and couldn’t make it. Morgenstein’s family were at home. “My kids don’t think it’s exciting,” he said, glumly. “They told me, ‘We saw the pilot already, in the car.’ They don’t realize it’s exciting for Dad.”

When the show began, the bar fell silent, and everyone watched as the network’s interpretation of the story unfolded—the heroine now had dark hair, a drug-addled brother, and an African-American best friend. (One of the show’s executive producers, Kevin Williamson, created “Dawson’s Creek.”) Even though the bar’s sound system faltered in the final segment—when the hero’s canines began to elongate at his sighting of the heroine’s neck—there was loud applause at its conclusion. (The ratings were excellent.)

After the episode was over, Morgenstein and Bank talked about some ideas for tweens that had come up in a meeting earlier in the day. The group had been discussing whether there was a new way to do “Jaws.” “In an age of Lyme disease, and scary stuff about the environment, what is the middle-grade version of that?” Bank said. “How do we find a story that is very alive and active in the minds of eight-to-twelve-year-olds?” Someone in the meeting had mentioned an audio clip, which had been circulating widely on the Internet, of a woman frantically calling 911 as a pet chimp mauled her friend. Morgenstein’s idea had been to cross this event with Stephen King’s novel about a rabid Saint Bernard. “It’s ‘Cujo’ with a chimpanzee,” as Morgenstein put it.

Bank had shot down the idea. “I said, ‘What is the P.O.V.? Is it P.O.V. chimp?’ ” Bank recalled. “He said ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘I’m off the train here.’ ”

“I also pitched rabid deer,” Morgenstein said, mildly. “But we came up with a compromise: ‘Jaws,’ with a grizzly bear, at summer camp.” ♦

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**NEWYORKER.COM/GO/OUTLOUD**

Rebecca Mead talks about books for teens.

FICTION

# COMPLICITY

BY JULIAN BARNES

When I was a hiccupping boy, my mother would fetch the back-door key, pull my collar away from my neck, and slip the cold metal down my back. At the time, I took this to be a normal medical—or maternal—procedure. Only later did I wonder if the cure worked merely by creating a diversion, or whether, perhaps, there was some more clinical explanation, whether one sense could directly affect another.

When I was a twenty-year-old, impossibly in love with a married woman who had no notion of my attachment and desire, I developed a skin condition whose name I no longer remember. My body turned scarlet from wrist to ankle, first itching beyond the power of calamine lotion, then lightly flaking, then fully peeling, until I had shed myself like some transmuting reptile. Bits of me fell into my shirt and trousers, into the bedclothes, onto the carpet. The only parts that didn't burn and peel were my face, my hands and feet, and my groin. I didn't ask the doctor why this was the case, and I never told the woman of my love.

When I divorced, my doctor friend, Ben, had me show him my hands. I asked if modern medicine was going back to palmistry, as well as to leeches; and, if so, whether astrology and magnetism and the theory of humors could be far behind. He replied that he could tell from the color of my hands and fingertips that I was drinking too much.

Later, wondering if I had been duped into cutting down, I asked him if he had been joking, or guessing. He turned my hands palm uppermost, nodded in approval, and said that he would now look out for unattached female medics who might not find me too repugnant.

The first time I met her was at a party of Ben's; she had brought her mother. Have you watched mothers and daughters at parties together, and tried to work out who is taking care of whom? The daughter giving Mum a bit of an outing, Mum watching for the sort of men her daughter attracts? Or both at the same time? Even if they're playing at best friends, there's often an extra flicker of formality in the relationship. Disapproval either goes unexpressed or is exaggerated, with a roll of the eye and a theatrical moue and a "She never takes any notice of me, anyway."

IRAIDA ICAZA

We were standing there, in a tight circle with a fourth person my memory has blanked out. She was opposite me, and her mother was on my left. I was trying to be myself, whatever that might be, and at the same time trying to make that self acceptable, if not actually pleasing. Pleasing to her mother, that is; I wasn't bold enough to try to please her directly—at least, not in company. I can't remember what we talked about, but it seemed to be going O.K.; perhaps the forgotten fourth helped. What I do remember was this: she had her right arm down by her side, and when she caught me looking in her general direction she inconspicuously made the smoking gesture—you know, the first two fingers extended and slightly parted, the other fingers and the thumb bent away out of sight. I thought, A doctor who smokes, that's a good sign. While the conversation continued, I got out my packet of Marlboro Lights, and without looking—my activity, too, was at waist level—extracted a single cigarette, returned the pack to my pocket, took the cigarette by the filter tip, passed it around her mother's back, and felt it being taken from my fingers. Noting a slight pause on her part, I went back to my pocket, took out a book of matches, held it by the striking end, felt it being taken from my fingers, watched her light up, exhale, close the book of matches, then pass it back behind her mother. I received it, delicately, by the same end as I had given it out.

I should add that it was perfectly obvious to her mother what we were doing. But she didn't say anything, sigh, give a prim glance, or rebuke me for being a drug peddler. I instantly liked her for this, assuming that she approved of the complicity between me and her daughter. She could, I suppose, have been deliberately holding back for strategic reasons. But I didn't care, or, rather, didn't think to care, preferring to assume approval. But this isn't what I was trying to tell you. The point wasn't about her mum. The point was those three moments when an object passed from one set of fingertips to another.

That was the nearest I got to her that evening, and for weeks to come.

Have you ever played that game where you sit in a circle and close your eyes, or are blindfolded, and have to guess what an object is just from the feel of it? And then you pass it on and the next person has to guess? Or you keep your guesses to yourselves until you've all made up your minds, and then announce them at the same time?

Ben claims that once, when he played it, a mozzarella cheese was passed around and three people guessed that it was a breast implant. That may just be medical students for you, but there's something about closing your eyes that makes you more vulnerable, or drives your imagination to the gothic—especially if the object being passed is soft and squishy. In all the times I've played the game, the most successful mystery item, the one guaranteed to freak somebody out, was a peeled lychee.

Some years ago—ten, fifteen?—I went to a production of "King Lear" played against a bare brick backdrop, with brutalistic staging. I can't remember who directed it, or who played the title role, but I do remember the blinding of Gloucester. This is usually done with the Earl pinioned and bent back over a chair. Cornwall says to his servants, "Fellows, hold the chair," and then to Gloucester, "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot." One eye is put out, and Regan chillingly comments, "One side will mock another; the other too." Then, a moment later, the famous "Out, vile jelly!" and Gloucester is pulled upright, with stage gore dripping down his face.

In the production I saw, the blinding was done offstage. I seem to remember Gloucester's legs flailing from one of the brick wings, though perhaps that is a later invention. I do remember Gloucester's screams, and finding them all the more terrifying for being offstage: perhaps what you can't see frightens you more than what you can. And then, after the first eye was put out, it was lobbed onto the stage. In my memory—in my mind's eye—I see it rolling down the rake, faintly glistening. More screams, and another eye was tossed from the wings.

They were—you guessed—peeled lychees. And then this happened: Cornwall, lanky and brutish, stamped back onstage, tracked down the lychees, and set his foot on Gloucester's eyes a second time.

Another game, from back when I was a hiccupping boy at primary school: In the morning break, we used to race model cars on the asphalt playground. They were about four inches

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long, made from cast metal, and had real rubber tires, which you could roll off the wheels if you felt like simulating a pit stop. They were painted in the bright colors worn by the racing marques of the day: a scarlet Maserati, a green Vanwall, a blue . . . perhaps something French.

The game was simple: the car that went the farthest won. You pressed your thumb down onto the middle of the long bonnet, pulling your fingers up into a loose fist, and then, at a signal, transferred the pressure swiftly from a downward to a forward direction, sending your car off into the distance. There was a certain technique involved in obtaining maximum propulsion, the danger being that the knuckle of your middle finger, held a fraction of an inch above the playground's surface, would scrape against the asphalt, tearing skin and costing you the race. The wound would scab up, and you'd have to adjust your hand, dropping the knuckle of the fourth finger into the danger area instead. But this never produced the same velocity, so you quickly went back to the usual, third-finger technique, often ripping off the newly formed scab.

Your parents never warn you about the right things, do they? Or perhaps they can warn you only about the immediate, local stuff. They bandage the knuckle of your right middle finger and warn against getting it infected. They explain about the dentist, and how the pain will wear off afterward. They teach you the highway code—at least, as it applies to junior pedestrians. My brother and I were once about to cross a road when our father put on a firm voice and instructed us to "pause on the curb." We were at the age when a primitive understanding of language is intersected by a kind of giddiness about its possibilities. We looked at each other, shouted, "Paws on the curb!," then squatted down with our hands flat on the edge of the roadway. Our father thought this was very silly; no doubt he was already calculating how long the joke would run.

Nature warned us; our parents warned us. We understood about knuckle-scabbing and traffic. We learned to look out for loose carpet on the stairs, because Grandma had once nearly taken a tumble when one of her brass stair rods, removed for annual polishing, hadn't been replaced properly. We learned about thin ice, and frostbite, and evil boys who put pebbles and sometimes even razor blades into snowballs—though none of these warnings were ever justified by events. We learned about nettles and thistles, and how grass, which seemed such harmless stuff, could give you a sudden burn, like sandpaper. We were warned about knives and scissors and the danger of the untied shoelace. We were warned about strange men who might try to lure us into cars or lorries, though it took us years to work out that "strange" did not mean "bizarre," "hunchbacked," "dribbling," "goitered"—or however we defined strangeness—but merely "unknown to us." We were warned about bad boys and, later, bad girls. An embarrassed science master warned us against V.D., misleadingly informing us that it was caused by "indiscriminate sexual intercourse." We were warned about gluttony and sloth and letting down our school, about avarice and greed and letting down our family, about envy and wrath and letting down our country.

We were never warned about heartbreak.

I used the word "complicity" a bit ago. I like the word. To me, it indicates an unspoken understanding between two people, a kind of pre-sense, if you like. The first hint that you may be suited, before the nervous trudgery of finding out whether you "share the same interests," or have the same metabolism, or are sexually compatible, or both want children, or however it is that we argue consciously about our unconscious decisions. Later, looking back, we will fetishize and celebrate the first date, the first kiss, the first holiday together, but what really counts is what happened before this public story: that moment, more of pulse than of thought, which goes, Yes, perhaps her, and Yes, perhaps him.

I tried to explain this to Ben, a few days after his party. Ben is a crossword-doer, a dictionary lover, a pedant. He told me that "complicity" means a shared involvement in a crime or a sin or a nefarious act. It means planning to do something bad.

I prefer to keep the term as I understand it. For me, it means planning to do something good. She and I were both free adults, capable of making our own decisions. And nobody plans to do anything bad at that moment, do they?

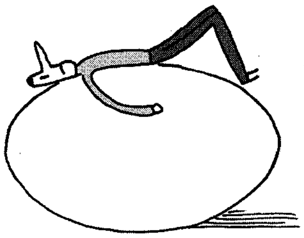
We went to a film together. I had as yet no clear sense of her temperament and habits. Whether she was punctual or unpunctual, easygoing or quick-tempered, tolerant or severe, cheerful or depressive, sane or mad. That may sound like a crude way of putting it; besides, understanding another human being is hardly a matter of box-ticking, in which the answers stay the answers. It's perfectly possible to be cheerful *and* depressive, easygoing *and* quick-tempered. What I mean is, I was still working out the default setting of her character.

It was a cold December afternoon; we arrived at the cinema in separate cars, as she was on call and might be bleeped back in to the hospital. I sat there, watching the film yet equally alert to her reactions: a smile, silence, tears, a shrinking from violence—all would be like silent bleeps for my information. The heating in the cinema was underpowered, and as we sat there, elbow to elbow on the armrest, I found myself thinking outward from me to her. Sleeve of shirt, sweater, jacket, raincoat, pea jacket, jumper—and then what? Nothing more before flesh? So, six layers between us, or perhaps seven if she was wearing something with sleeves under her sweater.

The film passed; her mobile didn't pulse; I liked the way she laughed. It was already dark when we got outside. We had walked halfway to our cars when she stopped and held up her left hand, palm toward me.

"Look," she said.

I didn't know what I was meant to be looking for: proof of alcoholism, her line of life? I moved closer, and noticed, with the help of passing headlights, that the tips of her first, second, and third fingers had turned a pale-yellowish color.



"Twenty yards without gloves," she said. "It just happens like that." She told me the name of the syndrome. It was a question of poor circulation, of the cold making the vessels constrict and cutting off the blood supply.

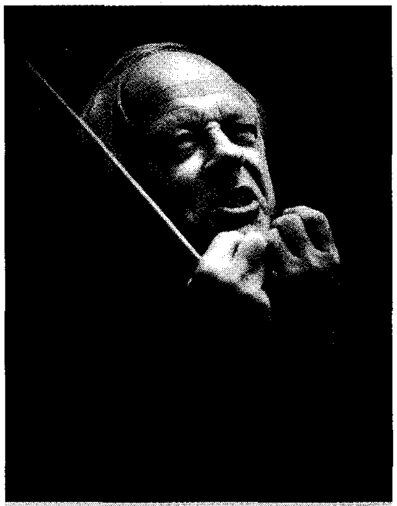
She dug in her pockets for gloves: dark-brown ones, I remember. She pulled them on a little haphazardly, then meshed her fingers to push the wool down to the base of each finger. We walked on, discussing the film, paused, smiled, paused, parted; my car was parked ten yards beyond hers. As I was about to unlock my door, I realized that she was still standing on the pavement, looking down. I gave her a few moments, decided that something was wrong, and walked back.

"The car keys," she said without looking up at me. There wasn't much light, and she was digging in her bag, feeling as much as looking for them. Then she added, with sudden violence, "Come on, you fool."

For a moment I thought she was talking to me. Then I realized she was angry only with herself, embarrassed by herself, and the more embarrassed that her inability to find her keys and also, perhaps, her anger were being witnessed by me. But I was hardly going to dock her points. As I stood there, watching her struggle, two things happened: I felt what I would describe as tenderness, were it not so ferocious; and my cock gave a sudden spurt of growth.

I remembered the first time a dentist gave me an injection; he left the room while the anesthetic took effect, returned briskly, slid his finger into my mouth, ran it around the base of the tooth he was going to fill, and asked if I felt anything. I remembered the numbness that strikes when you sit too long with your legs crossed. I remembered stories of doctors pushing pins into a patient's leg without the patient reacting at all.

What I wanted to know was this: If I had been bolder, if I had raised my right hand against her left, laid palm gently against palm, finger against finger, in some lovers' high five, and if I had then pressed the tips of my first,



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*"Would you really want to read a book by a comedian that didn't have wide margins?"*

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second, and third fingers against hers, would she have felt anything? What does it feel like when there's no feeling there—both to her and to me? She sees my fingers against hers but feels nothing; I see my fingers against hers, and feel them, but know that she feels nothing.

And, of course, I was also asking myself the question in a wider, more alarming sense.

I thought about one person wearing gloves and the other one not, about how flesh feels against wool, wool against flesh.

I tried to imagine all the gloves she might wear, both now and in the future—if there was to be a future I was present in.

I'd seen one pair of brown woollen gloves. I decided, given her condition, to equip her with several extra pairs in different colors. Then, for colder days and nights, some warmer, suède ones: black, I imagined, to match her hair, with heavy white stitching along the fingers, and beige rabbit-fur lining. And then, perhaps, a pair of those mittens like paws, with a lone thumb and a broad pouch for the rest of the fingers.

At work, she would presumably wear surgical gloves, thin latex ones offering the thinnest possible barrier between doctor and patient—and yet any barrier destroys that essential feel of flesh on flesh. Surgeons wear tight-fitting gloves, other medical staff looser ones, like those which deli workers wear when peeling slices of ham from the rotating blade.

I wondered if she was, or would ever become, a gardener. She might wear latex gloves for light work in well-tilled soil, for sorting out rootlets and seedlings and delicate foliage. But then she would need a stronger pair—probably a mixture of thin leather and some striped, canvassy material—for heavier work: pruning, forking the ground over, pulling up bindweed and nettle roots.

I wondered if she had any use for those gloves with cut-off fingers. I've never seen the point of them myself. Who wears them, apart from Russian sleigh drivers and misers in TV versions of Dickens? And, given what happened to the tips of her fingers, all the more reason not to.

I wondered if the circulation to her feet was curtailed as well, in which case: bed socks. What would they be like? Big and woolly—perhaps some ex-boyfriend's rugby socks, which would fall loosely around her ankles when she stood up? Or close-fitting and female? In some newspaper life-style supplement, I'd seen gaudy bed socks made with individual toes. I wondered if I'd find them a neutral accessory, comic, or somehow erotic.

What else? Might she ski, and have a pair of puffy gloves to match a puffy jacket? Oh, and, of course, washing-up gloves: all women had them. And always in the same, brashly unconvincing colors—yellow, pink, pale green, pale blue. You'd have to be a pervert to find rubber gloves erotic. Make them as exotic as you like—magenta, ultramarine, teak, pin-striped, Prince of Wales check—they'd never do anything for me.

No one says, "Feel this piece of Parmesan," do they? Except perhaps Parmesan makers.

Sometimes, alone in a lift, I will run my fingers lightly over the buttons. Not enough to change the floor I'm going to, just to feel the bumpy dots of Braille. And to wonder what it must be like.

The first time I saw someone wearing a thumbstall, I couldn't believe that there was a real thumb underneath it.

Do the slightest damage to the least important finger, and the whole hand is affected. Even the simplest actions—pulling on a sock, doing up a button, changing gears—become fraught, self-conscious. The hand won't go into a glove, has to be thought about when washed, mustn't be lain on at night, and so on.

Imagine, then, trying to make love with a broken arm.

I had a sudden, acute desire that nothing bad ever happen to her.

I once saw a man on a train with a hook for a hand. I was eleven or twelve, alone in my compartment. He came down the corridor, looked in, saw it was occupied, and passed on. At the time, I thought only of pirates and menace; later, of all you couldn't do; later still, of the phantom pain of amputees.

Our fingers must work together; our senses, too. They act for themselves, but also as pre-senses for the others. We feel a fruit for ripeness; we press our fingers into a joint of meat to test for doneness. Our senses work together for the greater good: they are complicit, as I like to say.

Her hair was up that evening, held by a pair of tortoiseshell combs, then pinned with gold. It was not quite as black as her eyes, but blacker than her linen jacket, which had a fade and a crease to it. We were in a Chinese restaurant, and the waiters were paying proper attention to her. Perhaps her hair looked Chinese. Or perhaps they knew that it was more important to please her than to please me. Or, rather, that pleasing her *was* pleasing me. She asked me to order, on the ground that I often came here, and I chose conservatively, sticking to what I liked. Seaweed, spring rolls, green beans in yellow-bean sauce, crispy fried duck, stewed aubergine, plain boiled rice. A bottle of Gewürztraminer and tap water.

Following her into the restaurant, I'd noticed that she was wearing scent, but, if you asked me to name it, I would be at a loss. And my descriptive terms are hardly sophisticated: nice, nasty, subtle, sexy, overpowering, rancid—that's my vocabulary exhausted. Anyway, restaurant smells soon took over as a mound of glistening spareribs passed our table on the way to another destination. Perhaps you smell Chinese food more than other cuisines because you lift the bowl nearer to your mouth than any table-bound plate ever gets. That night, even the plain rice had something characterful and earthy about it.

The background music was presumably the result of market research: a mixture of easy-listening Chinese and unobtrusive Western. Ignorable, except when there was an overfamiliar number. I suggested that if "Lara's Theme," from "Doctor Zhivago," came up on the tape, we should make a run for it and plead duress in court. She smiled, and asked if duress was really a defense in law. I went on at what might have been too great a length about this, then we talked about professional areas where we overlapped: where law came into medicine, and medicine into law. Then we talked about smoking, and the precise point at which we would want to light up, if smoking hadn't been banned in public places. After the main course and the vegetables, before the pudding, whether or not we had pudding, we agreed. A cigarette could be digestive, useful for tamping down. We each considered ourselves light smokers. Then we talked a little, though warily, about our childhoods. I asked how old she had been when the ends of her fingers had started turning yellow in the cold, and asked if she had lots of pairs of gloves, which made her laugh, for some reason. I was about to ask her to describe them, but thought she might get the wrong idea.

And, as the meal went on, I decided that it was going to be all right—though by "it" I meant only the evening, nothing more. Neither of us was suddenly going to yawn, or want to leave, or stop making an effort—not that it felt like an effort. And she must have felt the same, because when it came to pudding she changed her mind and said that she would have one after all, but nothing sticky and filling, so she had the lychees. And I decided not to tell her about that game from long ago, or about that production of "King Lear," but thought, Well, if we come back here again—not on the next date, but later on—then maybe I'll tell her. And I hope she never played the game with Ben and had to handle a mozzarella.

Just as I was thinking this, "Lara's Theme" oozed out of the speakers. We looked at each other and laughed, and she made a gesture as if she were going to push back her chair and rise, and maybe she saw alarm in my eyes, because she laughed again and then, playing along, threw her napkin down on the table. The gesture took her hand more than halfway across the cloth.

But she didn't get up, or push her chair back, just went on smiling, and left her hand on top of her napkin, knuckles raised, fingertips pointing toward me. And then I touched her. ♦

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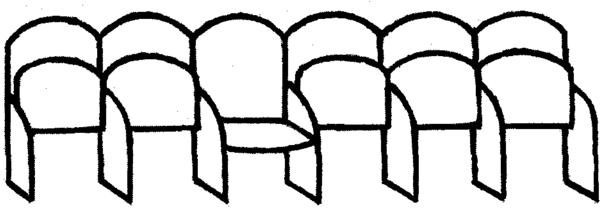


## BOOKS

# TUDOR TALES

*Hilary Mantel reconsiders the life of Thomas Cromwell.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

In the Living Hall of the Frick Collection, on either side of a fireplace, there are portraits by Hans Holbein of the two most illustrious politicians of the court of Henry VIII. On the left is Sir Thomas More, Henry's lord chancellor from 1529 to 1532, who, when the King needed an annulment of his marriage, and therefore a release from the duty of obedience to the Pope, was too good a Catholic to agree to this. For his refusal, he forfeited his office and, eventually, his life. Holbein's portrait shows him thin and sensitive, with his eyes cast upward, as if awaiting the sainthood that the Church finally bestowed on him, in 1935. On the right side hangs Holbein's portrait of Thomas Cromwell, the minister who did for Henry what More wouldn't. He wrote the laws making the King, not the Pope, the head of the English Church, and declaring the English monasteries, with all their wealth, the property of the Crown. To achieve these epochal changes, he had to impose his will on many people, and that is clear in Holbein's painting. Cromwell is hard and heavy and dressed all in black. His mean little eyes peer forward, as if he were deciding whom to pillory, whom to send to the Tower.

More and Cromwell were enemies, and history has taken More's side. Good examples are Robert Bolt's 1960 play, "A Man for All Seasons," and the 1966 movie that Fred Zinnemann based on it, both with Paul Scofield, as a saintly More, and Leo McKern, as Cromwell, the very picture of skulking evil. Shortly before Bolt's play, though, the eminent British historian G. R. Elton had begun claiming, in successive writings on the Tudors, that Cromwell wasn't so bad. Under him, Elton wrote, English political policy, formerly at the whim of the nobles, became the work of specialized bureaucracies. England thereby progressed from the Middle Ages into the modern period, and you can't make that kind of revolution without breaking eggs. Elton's research revealed, furthermore, that under Cromwell only about forty people per year were killed in the service of the Crown's political needs. That's a pretty cheap omelette. Yet Cromwell is still widely seen as the warty toad in the garden of the glamorous Henry VIII. In the Showtime series "The Tudors," he is, unequivocally, a villain. Earlier this month, a new biography was published: "Thomas Cromwell: The Rise and Fall of Henry VIII's Most Notorious Minister" (St. Martin's; $29.99), by Robert Hutchinson, an English writer of popular history books. Already in his preface, Hutchinson calls Cromwell "a devious, ruthless instrument of the state," a man who showed no compunction about "trampling underfoot the mangled bodies of those he had exploited or crushed."

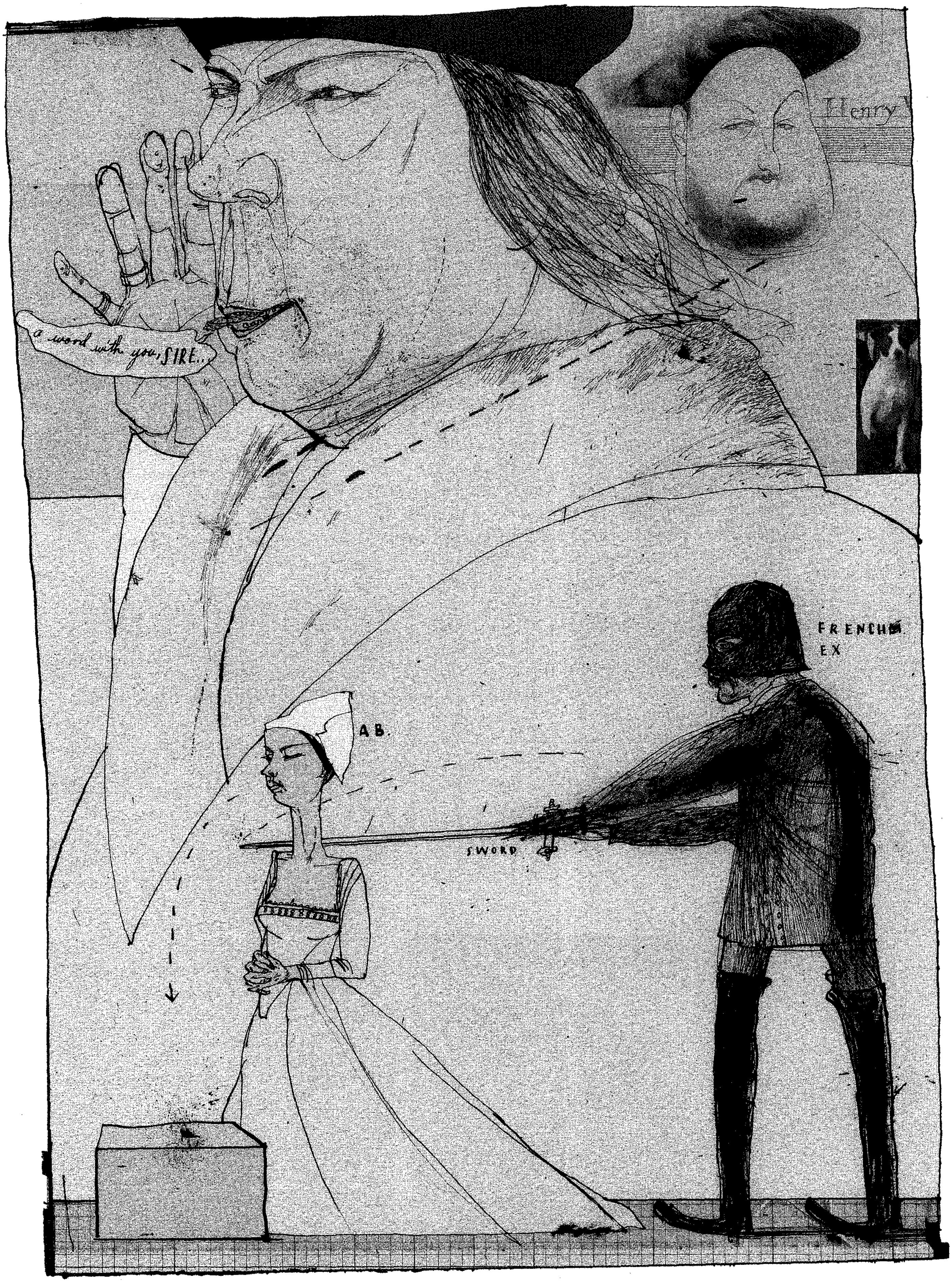
But now the excellent novelist Hilary Mantel has joined the tournament, with "Wolf Hall" (Henry Holt; $27), a five-hundred-and-thirty-two-page novel portraying Cromwell as a wise minister and a decent man. Mantel is not new to revisionist projects. In her 1992 novel "A Place of Greater Safety," about the French Revolution, she performed the amazing feat of making Robespierre a sympathetic man. Her interest is in the question of good and evil as it applies to people who wield great power. That means anguish, exultation, deals, spies, decapitations, and fabulous clothes. Mantel recently told an interviewer that she had long planned to write about the Tudors: "Almost all the stories you might want to tell are lurking behind the arras." Some are quite bawdy, which, if we can judge from the Tudor playwright Shakespeare, is true to the period. A waiter at an inn advises Cromwell not to order the pottage: "It looks like what's left when a whore's washed her shift."

Partly, no doubt, for this high color, which few people dislike, "Wolf Hall" last week won the Man Booker Prize, the U.K.'s most valued literary award. It was heavily favored; the London bookie William Hill gave it ten-to-eleven odds, the shortest ever accorded to a nominee.

Cromwell was the son of a blacksmith, who, in Mantel's account, beat him regularly and violently. At fourteen, he ran away, to the Continent, and he stayed there for more than a decade, learning several languages and trades. Returning to London, he became a business agent, mostly for cloth merchants, and a lawyer. In his mid-thirties, he entered government service, as an adviser to Cardinal Wolsey, Henry's princely lord chancellor. But Wolsey, having failed to obtain an annulment for the King, was soon dismissed. He died a year later. Mantel makes much of Cromwell's kindness to the disgraced man—a show of loyalty rare in the Tudor snake pit.

After Wolsey's death, Cromwell became a minister to Henry himself, and increasingly indispensable to him. He not only wrote—and pushed through Parliament—the laws that accomplished the English Reformation; he did much of the King's dirty work. When Henry decides that he needs the castle in which he has stowed his discarded wife, Katherine of Aragon, Cromwell is the one sent to inform the Queen that she is being relocated. He was famously persuasive. He could make your creditors weep, people said; he could convince your tenants that their rents were fair.

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: DAVID HUGHES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*Cromwell is still widely seen as the warty toad in the garden of the glamorous Henry VIII; Mantel portrays him as a decent man.*

His cunning was legend. When the King tires of Anne Boleyn, Cromwell watches for hints as to who has caught his eye, and, determining who it is, he immediately loans her father some money at low interest. Such shrewdness made him the most powerful man in England, second only to the King. The nobles hated him, the more so in that a person of such low birth should have been raised above them. "You are everything now," the Duke of Suffolk tells him. "We say, how did it happen?"

Mantel records Cromwell's maneuvers without disapproval. And she doesn't mind that, in his ascent, he got very rich. She tells how much property he owned, and she stresses his capacity for enjoyment. He loves his wife. (We glimpse them briefly, in bed, his hand resting on her "familiar but lovely left breast.") He adores his two little girls, especially Grace, the slow one. Early in the book, Grace succumbs to the "sweating sickness," which may have been a strain of plague. ("Grace dies in his arms. . . . He eases her back against the damp sheet.") Before her, the other girl had died, and their mother. But, even after his wife and daughters are gone, Cromwell's home breathes comfort. It smells of cakes. There is always a dog, and she is always named Bella. At one point, Cromwell picks up the current Bella, and she kicks her legs with happiness. The house is full of young people—his nieces and nephews, his wards, his assistants—telling jokes and running through the halls. The girls, especially, are wonderful. One day, the King comes to visit Cromwell, who has been dangerously ill. Cromwell's two nieces, Jo and Alice, make a fuss over the great man, and he is charmed. "Do you not notice, Master Secretary," he says to Cromwell, "the older one gets, the lovelier the girls?" It's like a Dutch painting.

Mantel doesn't hide Cromwell's bad deeds, or not always. She mentions the bribes he took, the spies he placed in important households. She tells us that he could kill. His servant Christophe, a ruffian whom he brought back from a trip to France, says that the other boys in the minister's employ perform innocent tasks. "Only you and me, master," he says to Cromwell, "we know how to stop some little fuckeur in his tracks, so that's the end of him and he doesn't even squeak." But Cromwell, as G. R. Elton emphasized, avoided killing. During the conflict over the annulment, Mantel's protagonist tries again and again to persuade More to make some concession, and thereby save his life.

As for More, he comes off badly, as a man who combines a milky piety with an underlying cruelty. We see him humiliating his wife in front of guests ("Remind me why I married you"), and we get the list of the "heretics" he imprisoned and tortured. Mantel acknowledges that he was a renowned thinker and writer, but she turns this to his discredit. At his trial, he sniggers when a clerk makes a mistake in Latin. Years earlier, in Mantel's account, he gave the same treatment to Cromwell. To earn a few pence—or perhaps just to get a meal—Cromwell, when he was seven, worked as a kitchen boy in the house of a cardinal where More was a student, and he had the job of delivering to the scholars, before they retired for the night, a mug of beer and a loaf of bread each. Bringing More his snack, he found him reading a big book. He had had no formal education; he was curious, and he asked More what was in the book. "Words, words," More replied. Cromwell, in one of his last interviews with More, asks him if he remembers their exchange that night, and More says no. Of course not. Why should he have taken a minute to tell a servant what was in a book, let alone remember the episode many years later? But Cromwell remembers, and as he is assembling the evidence against More he thinks of it. Mantel admires self-made men. (Her father was a clerk. Her mother went to work in a textile mill at the age of fourteen.) Hence, in part, her defense of Robespierre, and of Cromwell.

Mantel's characters do not speak sixteenth-century English. She has created for them an idiom that combines a certain archaism with vigorous modern English. It works perfectly. And how urbane her people are! When Wolsey, after his dismissal, arrives at the moldering castle to which he has been exiled, he gamely says to Cromwell that he will send for some people to sort out the kitchens: "They will be Italian. It will be violent at first, but then after three weeks it will work." The most striking feature of the book's storytelling, however, is the tightness of its point of view. Everything is seen through Cromwell's eyes. Here is the scene with which the book opens:

> "So now get up!" Walter is roaring down at him, working out where to kick him next. He lifts his head an inch or two, and moves forward, on his belly, trying to do it without exposing his hands, on which Walter enjoys stamping. "What are you, an eel?" his parent asks. He trots backward, gathers pace, and aims another kick.
>
> It knocks the last breath out of him; he thinks it may be his last. His forehead returns to the ground; he lies waiting, for Walter to jump on him. The dog, Bella, is barking, shut away in an outhouse. I'll miss my dog, he thinks.

At this juncture, we don't even know who "he" is. We soon find out, and we never leave him again. Mantel violates

grammar for his sake. Most of the "he"s and the "his"es in the book refer to Cromwell, including ones whose antecedents are not Cromwell. (The minister comforts a young man named Dick Purser, who is weeping: "Purser drops his shorn head against his shoulder." The shoulder is not Purser's; it is Cromwell's.) This is strange, but after a while you get used to it, and understand that the book is, without qualification, Cromwell's side of the story. It is a novel, not a history book. We have no reason, without external evidence, to believe that any of it is true—though Mantel makes us want to believe.

The prose is elastic. Sometimes it's elliptical. (After the beating with which the book opens, we don't see Cromwell again for twenty-seven years.) Elsewhere it is full, or overfull. The book has many descriptions of light; many things are said to be perfumed. One year, Cromwell's beloved Grace is given the role of an angel in a Christmas pageant, and Cromwell makes wings for her out of peacock feathers: "Grace stood glittering, her hair entwined with silver threads; her shoulders were trussed with a spreading, shivering glory, and the rustling air was perfumed as she breathed." That's a heavy load for little Grace to carry, but consider another scene, after the girl's death, when Cromwell goes to the storeroom to look at her wings:

> He touches them. His finger comes away dusty. He shifts his candle out of danger, then lifts them from the peg and gently shakes them. They make a soft sound of hissing, and a faint amber perfume washes into the air. He hangs them back on the peg; passes over them the palm of his hand, to soothe them and still their shiver.

There are the perfume and the shiver again. Now, however, they are not too much but exactly what Mantel needs in order to give Cromwell's grief its particular sword edge. First, there is the beautiful and spooky visual scene: the dark storeroom, the one candle, the hands running over the quivering feathers; the dust, as if from a shroud. Then there is the sudden, terrible realization that these wings, Cromwell's gift of love to his daughter, were also a prophecy of her death. That's what the shivering was, that's what needed to be soothed: Grace, dying. And that's what she was going to be—an angel, not just in a pageant. After this, the child hardly needs to be called Grace, but Mantel doesn't stint. She always goes for color, richness, music. She has read Shakespeare closely. One also hears the accents of the young James Joyce. As for the portentousness, the book is full of such effects, and they are entirely appropriate to the magnificent and dangerous world that is being described. Mantel should be congratulated for creating suspense about matters whose outcome we've known since high school. What's going to happen to Anne Boleyn? we think.

We need that excitement, because "Wolf Hall," however long, does not end with Cromwell's end. It doesn't even get Anne to the Tower. Apart from the beating at the opening, it covers only eight years, from 1527 to 1535. My understanding, from Mantel's interviews, is that she meant to take Cromwell to his death, but the conflict with More ran away with the story. So she went ahead with that, stopped at More's death, and began a second volume.

She doesn't exactly conclude with More's death, though. In a half-page coda, Cromwell is planning a trip that the King, wearied by the More business, will make to his western estates. Having noticed that Henry is taken with one of the daughters of Sir John Seymour, he adds to the royal itinerary a visit to Seymour's castle. "Five days," he says. "Wolf Hall." That is the last sentence of the book, and the first one in which we hear the phrase that is its title. Again, this is a portent. Wolf Hall is where Henry will find his third wife, Jane Seymour. But those words mean something else, too. At the beginning of the novel, Henry suffers terrible guilt and indecision over casting Katherine aside in favor of Anne Boleyn. As the book ends, he is about to rid himself of Anne—indeed, to have her executed, on cooked-up charges of incest and treason—in favor of Jane Seymour. Not just he but Cromwell, too, has become inured. "Man is wolf to man," Cromwell says flatly. More was beheaded in 1535, Anne a year later, in both cases on evidence gathered by Cromwell. Four years after that, Cromwell himself was led to the block. (Henry decided that his minister had given him some bad advice.) His head was put on a stake on London Bridge, facing away from the city and the King he had served so energetically. ♦

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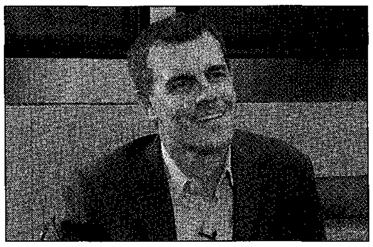

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### A CRITIC AT LARGE

# THE DEFIANT ONES

*In today's picture books, the kids are in charge.*

BY DANIEL ZALEWSKI

Anxious parents—the midnight Googlers who repeatedly seek advice from experts—learn that there are many things they must never do to their willful young child: spank, scold, bestow frequent praise, criticize, plead, withhold affection, take away toys, "model" angry emotions, intimidate, bargain, nag. Increasingly, nearly all forms of discipline appear morally suspect. The educator Alfie Kohn, writing recently in the *Times*, condemns the timeout—the canonical punishment of recent decades—declaring that it is more honest to say you are "forcibly isolating" your child. Even an approach as seemingly benign as awarding gold stars, Kohn warns, is a manipulation that "teaches children that they are loved" only when they perform a "good job."

So what should you do when a child throws a tantrum? Many parents, determined not to be cruel or counterproductive, latch on to pre-approved language from books. Walk through a Manhattan playground and you'll hear parents responding to their dirt-throwing, swing-stealing offspring with a studied flatness. A toddler whirling into a rage is quietly instructed, "Use your words." A preschooler who clocks his classmate is offered the vaguely Zen incantation "Hands are not for hitting." A kid demanding a Popsicle is given a bland demurral: "I'm sorry, but I don't respond to whining." (The preferred vocal inflection is that of a customer-service representative informing an irate caller that the warranty has, indeed, expired.) The brusque imperative "Say 'please'!" has been supplanted by the mildest of queries: "Is there a nicer way to say that?" The efficacy of this clinical approach has not been confirmed by science, but it certainly *feels* scientific, in part because the parents conduct themselves as if their child were the subject of a peer-reviewed experiment.

In this confrontation-averse age of parenting, in which the "escalation" of emotions is considered a mark of failure, a favorite way of inculcating discipline is the reading of picture books. The language of a good children's story is precise and consistent, offering a genial way for parents to address misbehavior. The Bank Street Bookstore, in Manhattan, now has a section called "Special Needs," with hundreds of picture books categorized by theme, such as "Manners" and "School" and "Siblings."

Many new picture books tout themselves as disciplinary tools. "Martha Doesn't Say Sorry!" (Little, Brown; $15.99), about a stubborn otter, emphasizes the pragmatic reasons for apologizing. (Among other things, your mom won't give you another cookie until you do.) "Anh's Anger" (Plum Blossom; $16.95), a yoga-inspired tale, promotes deep breathing as the ideal way to regain control during a tantrum. The popular "My Mouth Is a Volcano!," by Julia Cook and Carrie Hartman (National Center for Youth Issues; $9.95), is essentially an illustrated self-help book, aimed at getting children to stop interrupting. It starts off amiably enough, describing the cognitive "wiggle" and "jiggle" that leads inopportune words to "erupt." But the solution it prescribes takes the adage "Bite your tongue" to a literal extreme: "The next time your 'important words' are pushed into your teeth by your tongue, bite down hard and don't let them out."

Like the novel or the sitcom, the picture book records shifts in domestic life: newspaper-burrowing fathers have been replaced by eager, if bumbling, diaper-changers. Similarly, the stern disciplinarians of the past—in Robert McCloskey books, parents instruct children not to cry—have largely vanished. The parents in today's stories suffer the same diminution in authority felt by the parents reading them aloud (an hour past bedtime). The typical adult in a contemporary picture book is harried and befuddled, scurrying to fulfill a child's wishes and then hesitantly drawing the line. And the default temperament of the child is bratty, though often in a way so zesty and creative that the behavioral transgressions take on the quality of art. This idea is rendered explicit in Ian Falconer's best-seller "Olivia," when the main character—a pig whose chic tastes and easy effrontery suggest a porcine Gossip Girl in the making—takes a family trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Upon returning home, she gets out the paint and merrily gives one of her bedroom walls the Jackson Pollock treatment.

Olivia, who has been the subject of seven books, terrorizes her little brothers, tells baroque lies—after sharing a tall tale about her summer vacation, she breezily tells her teacher that it's "pretty all true"—and deposits dozens of outfits on her bedroom floor while accessorizing for school. In her anarchic spirit, she is a descendant of Maurice Sendak's Max, the wolf-suited boy from "Where the Wild Things Are" (1963). Though Max is also impressively naughty—he chases his dog down the stairs while brandishing a fork—his mother is not amused by his antics. He's sent off to bed without supper. After painting the wall, Olivia gets a brief timeout, but she's soon being served a delicious pasta dinner, and her elaborate bedtime ritual remains undisturbed. Falconer writes, "Of course, Olivia's not at all sleepy. 'Only five books tonight, Mommy,' she says. 'No, Olivia, just one.' 'How about four?' 'Two.' 'Three.' 'Oh, all right, three.'" Upon reading the last one, Olivia's mother tells her daughter, "You know, you really wear me out. But I love you anyway." Olivia, ever cheeky, replies, "I love you anyway too."

Though Olivia typically ends up with the upper hand, or hoof, she is an amateur compared with the protagonist of the new "Constance" series, by Pierre Le Gall, with illustrations by Éric Héliot. A surly schoolgirl whose beady eyes, encircled in red orbs, suggest a legacy of refused naps, Constance is a manipulator of demonic proportions. Two pages into the latest volume, "Constance and the Great Escape" (Sterling; $9.95), she's blasting a fire extinguisher directly into the principal's office. (Héliot's twisted pen-and-ink drawings have a glint of Gorey.) Her hapless parents, unable to control her, send her to boarding school, where the headmistress informs her, "You will learn respect and discipline." Constance outwits the adults, however. "At midnight, I came up with the perfect plan," she narrates. "I would *pretend* to be the ideal inmate." She submits so dramatically—raking leaves, scrubbing herself with cold washcloths—that she is released from captivity, and the headmistress chides her stunned parents, "You should try being nicer to your little girl." Constance returns home triumphantly, the unquestioned tyrant of the family.

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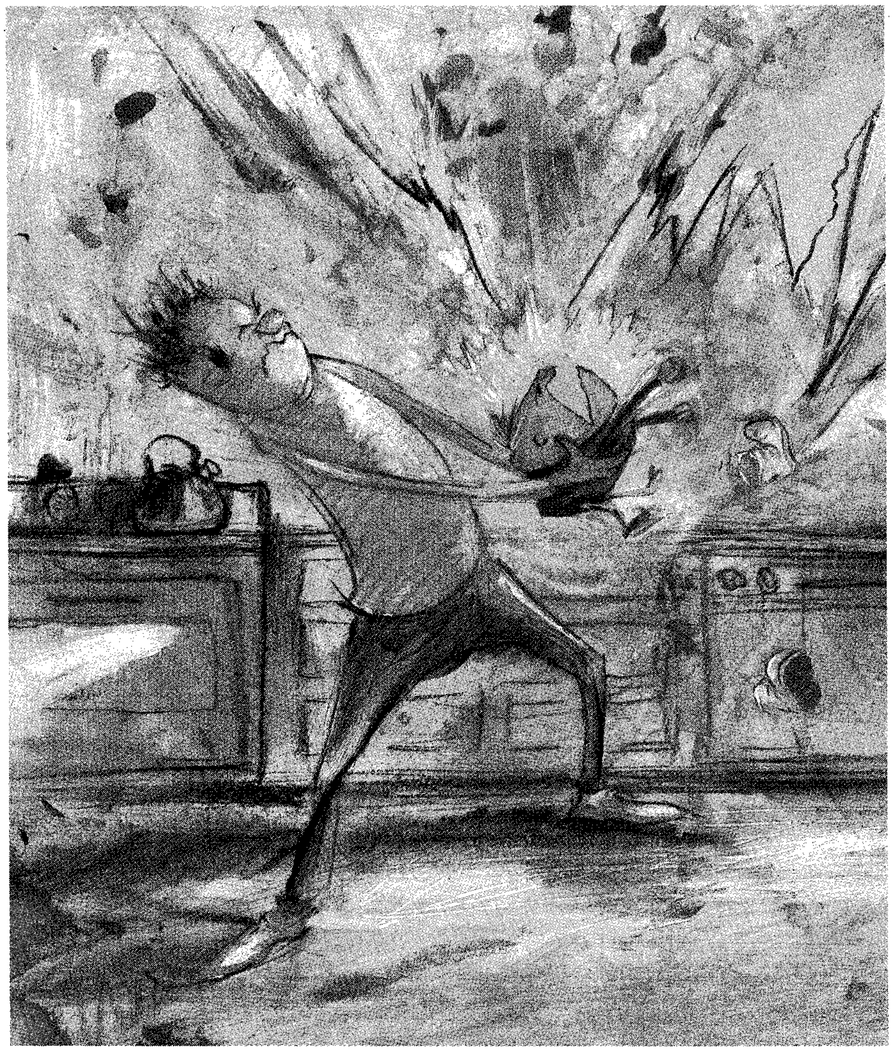


*An illustration by Timothy Basil Ering, from "Finn Throws a Fit!"*

One of the latest catchphrases to infect parental discourse is an admonishment against greed. A child who demands more Goldfish crackers is told, "You get what you get, and you don't get upset." (Despite the singsong rhyme, the phrase is rather grim—it could be a fragment from "The Collected Wisdom of Kim Jong Il.") The precise origins of the phrase are elusive, but its surge in popularity—one can buy T-shirts emblazoned with it—derives from its inclusion in one of the more successful picture books of recent years, "Pinkalicious," by Victoria and Elizabeth Kann (HarperCollins; $15.99).

"Pinkalicious" is a parable about gluttony. It begins, "It was a rainy day, too wet to go outside"—a limp echo of the couplet that opens "The Cat in the Hat" (1957). In Dr. Seuss's book, disorder could reign only when the mother left the house, but in "Pinkalicious" anarchy erupts in full view of the parents. A little girl and her mother spend the rainy afternoon baking bright-pink cupcakes; the girl gobbles one after another, and in the throes of a sugar rush demands "more, more, *more!*" In Victoria Kann's illustrations—computer-generated collages whose brittle sheen befits the protagonist—the girl swings upside down on a chandelier and sticks out her tongue.

The mother tries out the "You get

what you get" line. Fans of the magic phrase seem to have forgotten that, in the book, it doesn't work. "I got very upset," the girl narrates. After a tantrum subsides, she is, inexplicably, given more cupcakes.

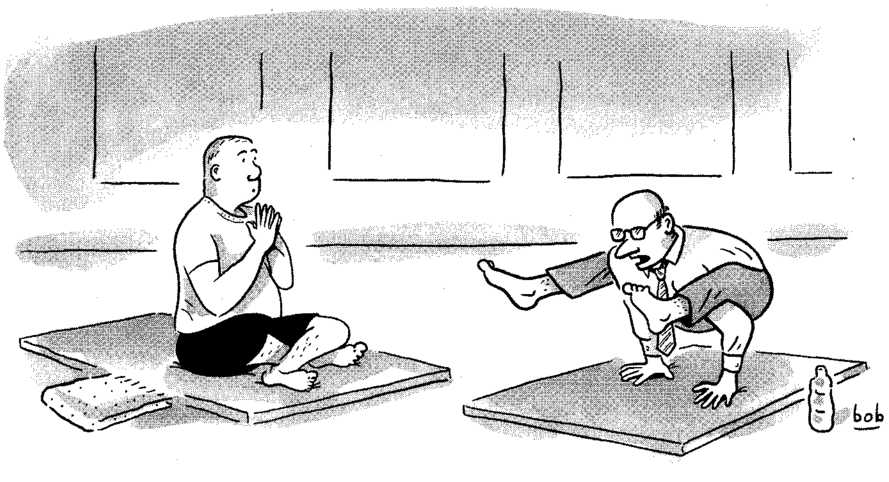
The next morning, the girl wakes up to discover that she is the color of "raspberry sorbet." Thrilled, she anoints herself Pinkerella (and delights in her "pinktails"—again, this is not Dr. Seuss). Her mother, having "speed-dialed the pediatrician," takes her to the doctor, who recommends a "steady diet of green food." The girl's reaction is, at least, direct: "YUCK!" After her parents go to bed, she steals some cupcakes that have been stashed atop the refrigerator, and turns fire-engine red. This hue not being to her princessy taste, she holds her nose and chokes down some vegetables; her skin regains its normal shade. By the final page, the girl has learned a lesson about healthy eating, and her parents have been thoroughly steamrolled.

Classic picture books like "Curious George" tend to present mischief as a pileup of innocent mistakes, and embed them within a narrative frame: a trip to the zoo, a night in the hospital. Many of today's popular picture books don't even bother with storytelling; they present misdeeds as pure spectacle. The theme, if there is one, is parental affection in the face of misbehavior. In David Shannon's best-selling "No, David!" (Scholastic; $14.95), each spread shows a boy—his face resembling that of a toothy jack-o'-lantern—engaged in a different act of riotous rule-breaking. His mother's face never appears. We see, in extra-large type, only her ignored pleas: "Come back here, David!"; "Not in the house, David!" The disasters that Shannon depicts have the hyperactive grandiosity of a Michael Bay movie. When David takes his toy shark into the bath, the spillage is worthy of Niagara Falls. In the final pages, there is a plot turn. David, after playing baseball in the house and shattering a vase, is made to sit in the corner. A single tear appears. "Davey, come here," the mother says, with huggy affirmation. "Yes, David . . . I love you!" Shannon captures the way a five-year-old feels constantly admonished—kids respond to the book with knowing laughter. (A Caldecott Honor winner, it has spawned five sequels.) Yet David is the kiddie version of the protagonist in a Showtime series: his flaws are the source of his allure. And a budding Constance could winkle some tactical advice from the book. Crying, it seems, is a fantastic way to get out of trouble.

Children's books have often replaced human families with furry counterparts, but a popular series from Scholastic offers a humiliating variation: the parents remain human, while their children are depicted as rampaging giant lizards. Without reading a word, we know who wields the domestic power. In the latest installment, "How Do Dinosaurs Say I Love You?" ($16.99), by Jane Yolen, with deadpan illustrations by Mark Teague, the rhymes confirm that the parents are pushovers: "Out in the sandbox you threw lots of sand. / You ran from the slide, after slapping my hand. / But you suddenly turned with a smile I adore. / Oh, I'll always love you, my dinosaur." It goes without saying that we parents should love our children unconditionally, but the implication here is that the slightest gesture of sweetness trumps a day's worth of belligerence. The grownups in "Dinosaurs" are easy prey. On one spread, a Nothosaurus hurls his pasta into the air, turning it into confetti; the parents gaze across the table with Hopperesque blankness. (To be fair, the dad manages a raised eyebrow.) Clearly, this is just a typical evening: "Dinner disaster! You made such a mess! / Would you stay up past bedtime? The answer was YES!"

Many recent picture books offer inventive variations on the theme of parental subjection. Consider a recent entry in the "Knuffle Bunny" series (Hyperion), by Mo Willems, which revolves around the obsessive relationship between Trixie, a Brooklyn girl, and her plush bunny. Trixie, beginning school in Park Slope, discovers that another girl owns the same toy. They accidentally switch bunnies. That night, Trixie wakes up and realizes that her comfort object is an alien impostor. She flips out—she wants Knuffle Bunny, *now!* Her dad sheepishly requests a reprieve: "Trixie's daddy tried to explain what '2:30 A.M.' means. He asked, 'Can we deal with this in the morning?'" Trixie's fixed stare makes clear that the answer is no. Salvation comes in the form of a ringing phone: the other girl's father, equally cowed, has called to propose a handoff in Prospect Park. There's an element of satire here, but the idea that children have executive authority is now so entrenched that many readers, old and young, are likely to consider a moonlit stuffed-animal exchange an ordinary turn of events.

The parents in picture books used to be tougher. In "Bedtime for Frances" (1960), a little badger—as clever as Olivia, but less snotty—devises various schemes for staying up late. ("I forgot to brush my teeth"; "There is a tiger in my room.") The author, Russell Hoban, lets young readers root for Frances but makes clear that it's not a game that the badger can win. Frances's father—after reminding her that he needs sleep so that he can be ready for his job the next morning—calmly issues the threat of a spanking.



*"I've had a lot of free time this year."*

Implied violence is probably not the ideal means of maintaining control. Yet, a few pages later, Frances is fast asleep.

Though most picture books portray misbehavior in comic terms, a new, psychologically attuned genre treats the subject much more earnestly. Entries in the anger-management category include "When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry . . ." (Scholastic; $16.99) and "The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum" (Sandpiper; $6.95). The best known is "Sometimes I'm Bombaloo," by Rachel Vail (Scholastic; $15.95), which is structured as a confession. A little girl, Katie Honors, begins by declaring how well behaved she is. "I can Velcro my own shoes, and put my toys where they belong," she boasts. But cracks begin to show: "I don't whine or stamp my feet or growl, even if my brother knocks down my beautiful castle I just built and I told him not to touch it and I'll never be able to get it to look that good again." Katie explodes at her brother, and, as she describes it, becomes a monster named Bombaloo. "It's scary," she says. The appealingly crude illustrations, by Yumi Heo, suggest an Incredible Hulk-style transformation without abandoning Katie's girlishness. Her hair spikes outward, as if she had been electrocuted; her arms distend grotesquely as she pushes and kicks. "When I'm Bombaloo," Katie explains, "I want to smash stuff. . . . I hate everybody and everything, even my dog, Vanilla." In her rage, Bombaloo starts ripping the clothes out of her bureau. Then: "A pair of underpants lands on my head. Like a hat. When I laugh I'm Katie Honors again." The book is sympathetic but not indulgent. Katie has to apologize to her brother, and, unlike Olivia, she has to put away all those clothes.

The "Bombaloo" idea of a split self is applied exclusively to tantrums, but the recent "Sourpuss and Sweetie Pie," by Norton Juster (Scholastic; $16.95), posits that all forms of childhood anger—from pickiness to frustration with errands—are a form of dissociative disorder. The illustrations, by Chris Raschka, are a stylized homage to children's refrigerator-door scribbles; the rambunctious protagonist, a little girl visiting her grandparents' house, is painted with frenzied swirls that suggest permanent motion. As the grandparents see it, the girl has a Sibyl-like condition. When she is Sweetie Pie, she makes presents and puts on shows and praises Nanna's wrinkles; when she is Sourpuss, her manic energy turns oppositional. Juster, the author of the classic "The Dot and the Line," humorously conveys the absurd specificity of a mealtime snit. "I don't like orange juice with pieces in it," the girl declares. "The napkin is on the wrong side, and it's not my special plate." And a clever spread depicts the quicksilver way that a moody child can shape-shift: we see Sourpuss turn into Sweetie Pie in a line of images that suggests Eadweard Muybridge by way of Crayola. The story is ultimately depressing, though, its attitude about misbehavior defeated and fatalistic. The girl, explaining her lurches into nastiness, says, "It just happens." And the book ends with a creepy tableau, in which we see *two* girls lying on a bed: one asleep, the other wild-eyed and screaming. "Pleasant dreams, girls," the grandparents say, closing the door. "I wonder who'll be there in the morning." Such gibes are clearly meant for the adult reader. After a day of failing to control your child, it's nice to take comfort in a wisecrack.

The strength of "Finn Throws a Fit!" (Candlewick; $16.99), a new book by David Elliott, is its lack of metaphor. Finn gets cranky when he's offered some peaches, has an epic tantrum, then calms down—all while remaining good old Finn. The book is visually explosive. Colored-pencil drawings, by Timothy Basil Ering, have the aggressive scrawl of Cy Twombly, and outdo "Bombaloo" in conveying the world-shaking feel of a tantrum. One panel features a quivering Earth below the text "He kicks. An earthquake shakes the world." The parents cannot stop Finn's tantrum, but they're not wimps. One terrific illustration shows the father holding Finn while he's raging in the kitchen. A gale-force wind is emanating from the boy's mouth, but the dad, reassuringly, won't let go. No flying underwear is required to return Finn to good humor. The text is matter-of-fact: "The fit goes on and on. It lasts until it doesn't." Young readers will enjoy the overblown illustrations, but they won't feel that it's funny to have a fit, or that such eruptions are ordinary; Elliott portrays them as rare and menacing, like a hurricane. This wise book acknowledges that childish anger can't be willed away, but also suggests that parents and children can ride out the storm together.

The oddest tantrum story is "Harriet,

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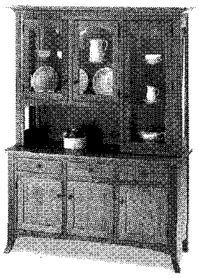

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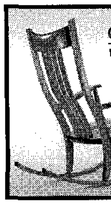

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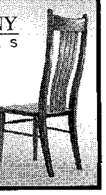

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You'll Drive Me Wild!," by Mem Fox, illustrated by Marla Frazee (Harcourt; $7). In this case, it's the mother who goes Bombaloo. This wretched book, clearly intended as a palliative for guilty parents, focusses on a mother's struggle to maintain her equanimity while her "pesky" child commits a series of infractions. Harriet is far less devilish than Constance or David; she's a blunderer who knocks over her juice glass and rips a pillow while playing with the cat. Each time Harriet screws up, the mom recites one of those anodyne parental scripts: "Her mother didn't like to yell, so instead she said, 'Harriet, my *darling* child. Harriet, you'll drive me wild. Harriet, sweetheart, what are we to do?' " When the pillow feathers fly, though, the mom snaps: "She yelled and yelled and yelled." Harriet collapses in tears, and her mother apologizes, though she claims to be as helpless as Sweetie Pie: "Sometimes it happens, just like that." This maudlin tutorial on parental stress makes one long for A. A. Milne, who conjured the worried mum with a light touch: "*What* is the matter with Mary Jane? / She's crying with all her might and main, / And she won't eat her dinner—rice pudding again— / What *is* the matter with Mary Jane?"

Still, if you've ever struggled to remain serene when a toddler, deciding that her new shoes are too tight, hurls them into your face—I mention no names—you'll have to acknowledge that "Harriet" has one virtue. It dares to picture a parent in a state of all-out anger. Too many experts instruct adults to act like a piano whose soft pedal is permanently pressed down. It's possible to find something sinister in the effort to hide half your emotional spectrum from your children. Sometimes it might be a good thing for a kid to hear, instead of polite evasions, an honest, full-throated "Cut it out!"

One of the best writers of contemporary picture books is Kevin Henkes, a Wisconsin artist, whose Midwestern good sense is paired with a cheery pastel palette. For the past two decades, he has been depicting families as amiable, orderly mice. Henkes's clean lines give his dot-eyed creatures a machined, Hello Kitty cuteness, but their emotions are palpably human. Henkes's parental characters—who furtively turn to books such as "The Inner Mouse, Vol. 1: Childhood Anxiety"—are the more realistic heirs to the unfailingly wise badgers of Hoban's "Frances" series, who outflanked their daughter with sitcom efficiency.

A number of Henkes's books center on a bright girl named Lilly. She is a good kid, but imperfect. "Lilly's Big Day" (Greenwillow; $17.99) chronicles her bitterness when a rival child is selected to be the flower girl at a wedding. "Julius, the Baby of the World" (Greenwillow; $16.99) is about Lilly's jealousy of her new baby brother. Henkes often depicts parents as scratching their heads, brows furrowed, and portrays their speech as comically deliberate. Lilly, whose loud singing threatens to wake the baby, is asked, "Why don't you put some of that verbal exuberance to good use?" At the same time, the parents are firm and consistent. When Lilly calls Julius a "germ," or pinches his tail, she is swiftly sent to the "uncooperative chair." (In Henkes's universe, at least, a timeout works pretty well.)

"Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse" (Greenwillow; $16.99), the best Lilly story, is about rudeness and interrupting. In its subtlety, it is worlds away from "My Mouth Is a Volcano!" Lilly, a teacher's darling, comes to school with a new purse, and is frustrated by the long wait until show-and-tell. During a reading lesson, Lilly bursts out, "Look, everyone. Look what I've got!" Her teacher, Mr. Slinger—another competent adult—takes away the purse: "I'll just keep your things at my desk until the end of the day." Lilly's anger festers all afternoon, until, in retaliation, she draws a mean picture of Mr. Slinger—giving it the title "Big Fat Mean Mr. Stealing Teacher"—and slips it into his briefcase.

Lilly, unlike her fictional peers, doesn't revel in her clever misdeed. Instead, she spends the evening feeling "simply awful" about the bad thing that she's done. Lilly skips cartoons and puts herself in the uncoöperative chair. She then confesses to her parents, who help her focus on what she can do to make amends. Henkes's book is squarely traditional in its message, yet in the context of modern picture books its confidence in the idea that young children are capable of sympathy—even moral growth—feels positively radical. ♦

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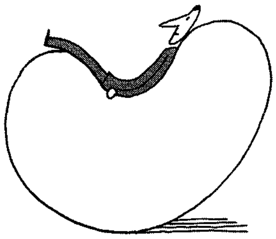
A slide show from books discussed here.

# BRIEFLY NOTED

Keynes, *by Robert Skidelsky (PublicAffairs; $25.95).* "Everyone is a Keynesian in the foxhole," the economist Robert Lucas admitted earlier this year. Skidelsky's book, supplementing his three-volume biography of the original macroeconomist, is an attempt to analyze the current financial mess as Keynes might have. The task is complicated by Keynes's famous indifference to consistency. The core of his economic theory, Skidelsky insists, is a belief in genuine uncertainty, and a rejection of the fanciful mathematical models preferred by today's young geniuses. He reminds us that Keynes was not only an economist but a cultural omnivore, a winning aphorist, and a sharp enough intellect to make Bertrand Russell feel "something of a fool" in his presence. If anything, Skidelsky oversells Keynes's singular vitality, leaving one with the sinking feeling that his best ideas will never be resurrected without the man himself to propound them.

Beg, Borrow, Steal, *by Michael Greenberg (Other; $19.95).* Though he has lately found success with "Hurry Down Sunshine," a memoir of his daughter's mental breakdown, for decades Greenberg treated writing as a strictly part-time business. Binding together this episodic autobiography is the series of marginal jobs—mover, Bronx street vender, author of voice-over narration ("Golf. Simple. Majestic. Timeless")—with which he supported his literary career. The book's forty-four brief chapters originated as essays for the *Times Literary Supplement*, but they cohere well. Themes emerge by accretion, notably his family's ambivalence about his work. His father, a scrap-metal dealer, asks, "Which do you think is worth more, a commodity or some goddamn idea?" The real attraction, however, is less family drama than the everyday texture of metropolitan life, which Greenberg captures with diaristic immediacy.



The Financial Lives of the Poets, *by Jess Walter (Harper; $25.99).* The protagonist of Walter's first novel since the National Book Award finalist "The Zero" is a former financial journalist turned proprietor of poetfolio.com, an ill-conceived Web site featuring investment advice written in verse. Having gambled everything on this quixotic idea, he finds himself hobbled by debt and six days from losing his family home to a mortgage company. The only way out of his predicament, he decides, is to start dealing pot. The novel riffs (often in blank verse) on everything from balloon mortgages to thong-wearing suburban moms. Despite its unlikely conceit, the novel has warmth, and its protagonist emerges as a bourgeois Everyman of the downturn. Looking up at his "angular, two-story 1917 Tudor" house, he reflects, "I actually allowed myself to believe that a person could own a piece of the world when the truth is that anything you try to own ends up owning you."

Blame, *by Michelle Huneven (Sarah Crichton; $25).* In the short first section of this elegant, hair-raising novel, Joey, a precocious twelve-year-old, gets her ears pierced by her uncle's girlfriend, Patsy, who seems like a minor character until Part Two, when she wakes up in jail and her story takes over. Patsy is a blackout drunk, accused of having run over and killed a mother and daughter in the driveway of her house. In prison, where she works at a firefighting camp, she is forced to join A.A., and guilt drives her not only to make amends but to do good. Released and sober, she takes an apartment with no associations, returns to her job teaching history, marries, and is negotiating a sticky web of relationships, when Joey, now in her twenties, reappears, with disorienting information. Huneven's prose is flawless, with especially arresting descriptions of the Southern California landscape, and her strong but fragile heroine is mercilessly honest.

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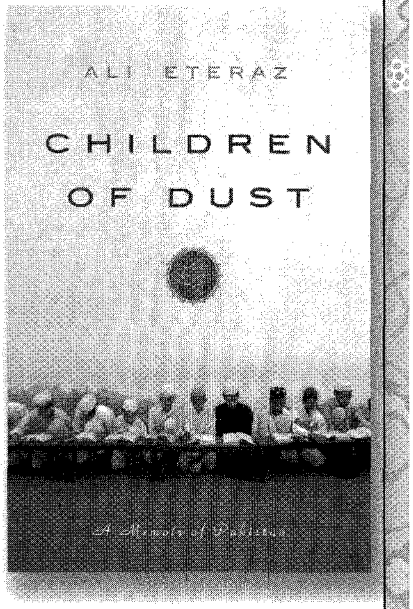

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—**Murad Kalam, author of *Night Journey***

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## BOOKS

# SONGS OF MYSELF

*Lydia Davis's very, very short stories.*

### BY JAMES WOOD

In a small, calm, plain town, a woman spends her days looking after her toddler. She tells us about her afternoon routine, in which she leaves the house around four o'clock, goes to the post office and the park, does some errands, and always makes sure that she is home by five-thirty, when "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" begins. The woman is somewhat embarrassed to be such a devoted viewer, but has recently consoled herself with the information that the pianist Glenn Gould loved the show. She is surprised by this. "I see two of my worlds coming together that I had thought were as far apart as they could be." She explains that Glenn Gould was a model for her when she was learning the piano; she imitated the clarity of his fingering, and would practice for four or even six hours at a time. "I did not intend to make a career of music, but I could happily have spent my days working as hard at the piano as any professional, partly to avoid doing other things that were harder, but partly for the pleasure of it."

But she does not seem to play the piano now. Mainly, as far as one can tell, she does things that are harder: she looks after her baby, and thinks, and manages, with varying success, her loneliness, and talks or, rather, fails to talk to her husband, when he is home. There is an unexplained gap between her early ambition and the present banality of her existence. The woman speaks patiently, intelligently, with a slightly fraught lucidity, and one does not immediately notice the absolute devastation of her sentences. At dinner, when she and her husband have nothing else to talk about, he asks her about the show. "I will tell him something one of the characters said and I can see he is ready to laugh even before I tell it, though so often, in the case of other subjects, he is not terribly interested in what I say to him, especially when he sees that I am becoming enthusiastic." It might be not unusual to have a husband who isn't very interested in what you have to say, but it is a harder condition to have a husband who is especially uninterested in what you have to say when you become enthusiastic about it. The former can be dealt with, perhaps; the latter seems unbearable. And this is so glancingly disclosed. We are not very surprised when this woman later tells us, "I wish the baby would go to sleep and my husband would not come home for dinner."

This monologue is entitled "Glenn Gould," and it is by Lydia Davis. At nine pages, it is longer than most of Davis's works, which are typically between three and four; many are as brief as a paragraph, or a sentence. Most of them are not conventional "stories"—they usually feature people who are unnamed, are often set in unnamed towns or states, and lack the formal comportment of a story that opens, rises, and closes (or fails to close, in an acceptably modern way). There is no gratuitous bulk, no "realistic" wadding. Davis's pieces, often narrated by a woman, sometimes apparently by the writer herself, are closer to the soliloquy than to the story; they are essayistic poems—small curiosity boxes rather than large canvasses.

I first heard of Lydia Davis not long after I arrived here from England, in the mid-nineties. Someone told me that she sounded like the tempestuous Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard (she does and doesn't), and recommended her stories. She was known as a translator of the French autobiographer Michel Leiris and the philosopher and critic Maurice Blanchot. (Proust came later.) The Frenchness, the spare forms, and the philosophical rigor, among other things, made her work glamorous in literary circles. It was all too easy to peer down the stretched telescope of the "writer's writer," and see a fashionably limited dot. I greatly enjoyed her stories, but did so intermittently and unsystematically, as their own intermittence seemed to desire and deserve. That was shallow, as several weeks with "The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $30) taught me. Finally, one can read a large portion of Davis's work, spanning three decades and more than seven hundred pages, and a grand cumulative achievement comes into view—a body of work probably unique in American writing, in its combination of lucidity, aphoristic brevity, formal originality, sly comedy, metaphysical bleakness, philosophical pressure, and human wisdom. I suspect that "The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis" will in time be seen as one of the great, strange American literary contributions, distinct and crookedly personal, like the work of Flannery O'Connor, or Donald Barthelme, or J. F. Powers.

Davis's reputation may be forbidding (bizarrely, she is sometimes called "dour"), but her tone is dancelike, insouciant, and often very funny. Her work contains many piquant details: "My mother and I once carried a piece of coal on a train to Newcastle." In a story about a woman who wanted to marry a cowboy, the narrator meets a man who does resemble a cowboy but isn't one: "He didn't work as a cowboy but at some kind of job where he glued the bones of chimpanzees together." The smallest pieces are sometimes sweet jeux d'esprit, and are like the captions you might encounter at a contemporary art installation (the rare kind that is enchanting and doesn't drive you insane). "Collaboration with Fly," in its entirety, is one sentence: "I put that word on the page, but he added the apostrophe." Likewise, "Idea for a Short Documentary Film": "Representatives of different food products manufacturers try to open their own packaging." Another ditty, titled "Companion," runs, in toto, "We are sitting here together, my digestion and I. I am reading a book and it is working away at the lunch I ate a little while ago." Even when there is less obvious sweetness, there is still real wit. The two lines of "Insomnia" are:

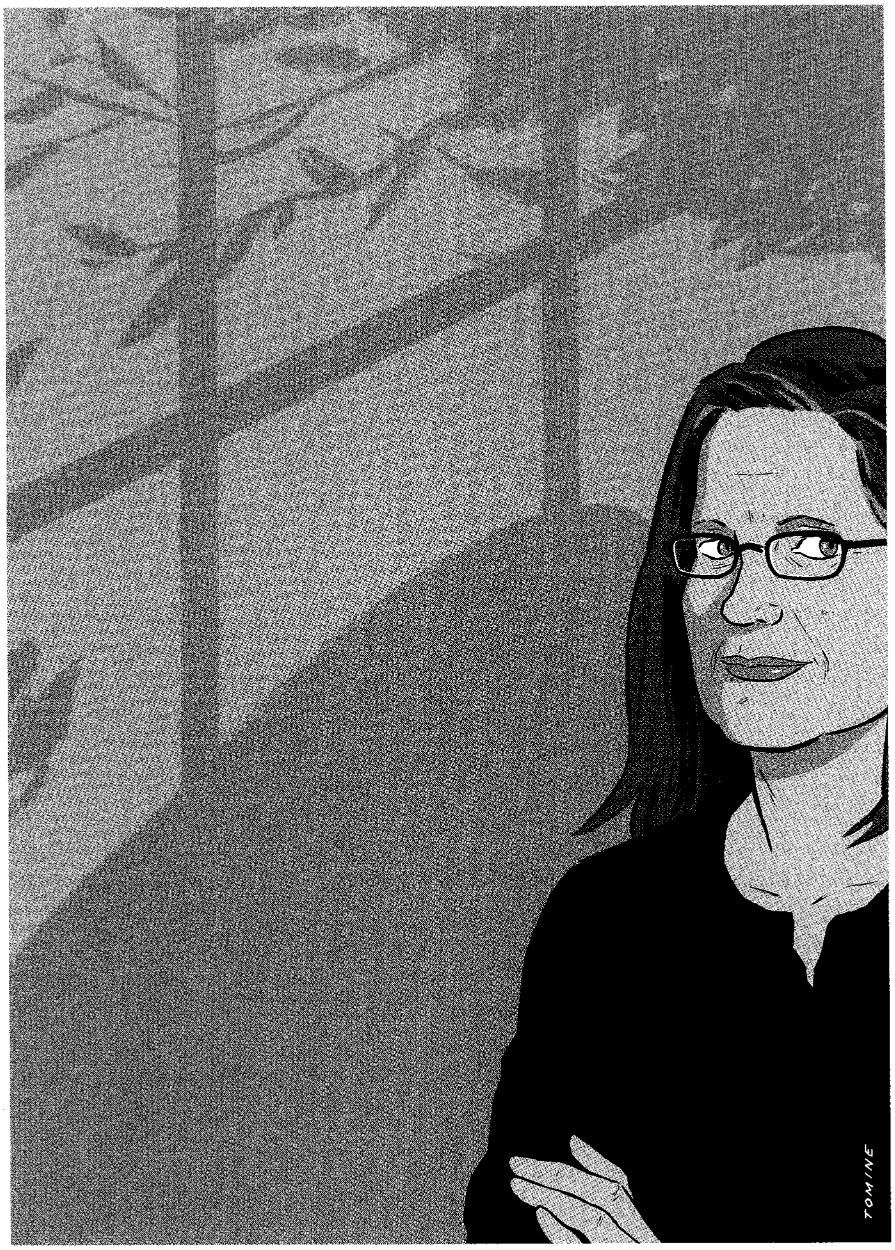
> My body aches so—
> It must be this heavy bed pressing up against me.

Davis likes playing logical, amusing, and estranging games with familiar phrases. "Special Chair," which is a single paragraph long, teases the pompous academic term for a "named" professorship:

> He and I are both teachers in the university system . . . and we would certainly like to be given a special chair at our universities, but what we have gotten so far is the wrong kind of special chair, a special chair belonging to a friend, a chair that swivels and has splayed feet and is special to her for reasons we can't remember.

Or there is the Kafkaesque joke (Kafkaesque, but also a joke about Kafkaesque gloominess) of "The Fellowship": "It is not that you are not qualified to receive the fellowship, it is that each year your application is not good enough. When at last your application is perfect, then you will receive the fellowship." In this mode, Davis is funny in a way that recalls the great eighteenth-century aphorist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who delighted in such things as "He marvelled at the fact that cats had two holes cut in their fur at precisely the spot where their eyes were," and meaningful silliness like "A list of printing errors in the list of printing errors."

What deepens the work, and moves it from game to drama, is that this brisk, insouciant, almost naïve tone is often revealed to be a mask, a public fiction, behind which a person is flinching. Take a characteristic story, "Ethics." The single paragraph begins in apparently high spirits, and sounds like a good Davis puzzle. A nameless narrator tells us that, on an interview program about ethics, she heard that "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" is the concept that underlies all systems of ethics. "At the time, I was pleased to learn of a simple rule that made such sense." A moment's reflection, however, complicates matters: "When I try to apply it literally to one person I know, it doesn't seem to work. One of his problems is that he has a lot of hostility toward certain other people and when I imagine how he would have them do unto him I can only think he would in fact want them to be hostile toward him, as he imagines they are, because he is already so very hostile toward them." It seems significant that the narrator feels no need to identify this man. Is he a lover, or the unnamed former husband who appears so often in Davis's work? All we can guess is that he is important to the narrator, and that one of the people he is hostile toward is her.



*Lydia Davis's work combines aphoristic brevity with emotional expansiveness.*

In such pieces, what is omitted or suppressed becomes highly charged, and the hunger strike of the spare, lucid words on the page can take on a desperate aspect. The four-page story "Happy Memories" has a deceptively jaunty tone. The narrator tells us that she fears getting old and being alone. Yet people say that an old woman at least has her "happy memories" to console her. "When her pain is not too bad, she can go over her happy memories and be comforted." What bothers the narrator is that she is not sure how many happy memories she will have, or, indeed, what makes for a happy memory. "I am happy doing the work I do, alone at a desk. That work is a great part of every day. But when I am old and alone all the time, will it be enough to think about the work I used to do?" Happy memories, she reflects, have to involve relations with other people, but, strikingly, the narrator can barely summon anyone who has been close to her. She mentions her mother, briefly, and in the entire story there is this single, and singular, reference to an actual family: "There have been a few times of gardening together as a family that may make a good happy memory." Gardening! Everyone else the narrator mentions seems to be only slightly known—a man who fixes the dehumidifier, a neighbor who once brought some cake, the librarian down the street. Besides, the narrator continues, for a memory to remain happy it must not be erased by an unhappy event on the same day. "You have to make sure, somehow, that nothing spoils the thing while it is happening, and then that no later experience erases it." She concludes her brief, shattering inquiry thus: "I should check now and then to make sure I am not alone too much, or unhappy with other people too often. I should add them up, now and then: what are my happy memories so far?" The word "happy," savagely measured out and repeated, is not the only reminder of Beckett here; the relentless control of the tone, grave and comic at once, gives the story an implacable Beckettian power.

The woman in "Happy Memories" seems to move between unsatisfactory loneliness and unsatisfactory community. To read the "Collected Stories" is to make a voyage around a composite narrator, who at times seems relatively distant from the author named Lydia Davis, and at times seems confessionally proximate. Stories like "Ethics" and "Happy Memories" acquire an increased resonance from their placement as way stations on this longer personal journey. A nameless hostile man or the absence of a mate seems more significant on the page when so many of the other stories feature a woman who has quarrelled with a lover or husband, or a woman who is separated from someone whom she nevertheless insists on calling not "my former husband" but "my husband," or a woman living unhappily alone, or a woman looking after a small boy, without much help from anyone else. In "Therapy," a female narrator, estranged from her husband and looking after a son, is struggling to maintain her courage. "In the morning I drank coffee and smoked. In the evening I drank tea and smoked and went to the window and back and from one room into the next room. Sometimes, for a moment, I thought I would be able to do something. Then that moment would pass and I would want to move and not be able to move." She tells us that her brain is spinning "like a fly." But shame and pride mean that one's chin must be kept up. Her "husband" comes around, "and he would sit down and talk to me, breathing into my face until I was exhausted. I wanted to hide from him how difficult my life was." (That phrase "breathing into my face until I was exhausted" is pungently alive.)

## FROM WEYMOUTH

What made you wake me so early
And with a look of mischief say,
A start this fine's surely a sign
The sea is calling us today?
The train was blue, the water green:
A tinted postcard sent in May.

I'm sure I must have held your hand
In backstreets crammed with grockle shops
And pubs and reeling fishermen.
The smell I couldn't place was hops.
I rode in state along the beach,
Beside the ride that never stops.

I missed a few easy lessons.
The teacher smiled, as if to say
It's fine—it would have been a crime
To hear the call and disobey.
What did you do? The train was blue.
We had tea at a beach café

And well-thumbed fish-paste sandwiches—
That gritty complement to hours
Spent toeing desperately the line
Around two limpet-cladded towers
The sea and I besieged, the moat
I'm sure I must have said was ours.

What made me want to go early
And with a look of mischief say,
But I'm hungry? You wrote in haste:
His Highness made the donkeys bray.
The train was blue, the water green.
Yours, waiting by the beach café.

—*Will Eaves*

The woman in "What an Old Woman Will Wear" hopes that she will have a husband by the time she is old. "She had once had a husband, and she wasn't surprised that she had once had one, didn't have one now, and hoped to have one later in her life." Among the most affecting pieces in the book, "Wife One in Country" is barely more than a page long and begins like this: "Wife one calls to speak to son. Wife two answers with impatience, gives phone to son of wife one." It continues, in the same style of battered telex: "After speaking to son, much disturbance in wife one." Wife one imagines her former husband married to a future "wife three," whose job would be to protect her husband "not only from raging wife one but also from troublesome wife two." (As elsewhere, comedy, a necessarily durable cloth, lines the sadness.) The dispatch ends with wife one eating dinner alone while watching television: "Wife one swallows food, swallows pain, swallows food again, swallows pain again, swallows food again."

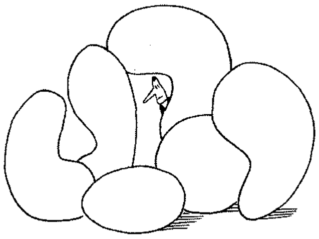
In more conventional fiction, stuffed with conventional novelistic characters, the reader is allowed to overhear the thoughts of other people. In Davis's soliloquizing work, a narrator is often overhearing herself, and we are then allowed to overhear this painful and funny self-overhearing. More often than not, this narrator does not like what she hears of herself. "If I were not me and overheard me from below, as a neighbor, talking to him, I would say to myself how glad I was not to be her, not to be sounding the way she is sounding," a woman tells us in "From Below, as a Neighbor."

You could say that selfishness, in every sense of the word, is Davis's real theme: the overbearing presence of the self, the insistent internal volume of the self, the dunning inescapability of being who one is. The woman who watches "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" reflects, with implied envy, on the way that Gould lived life on his own terms, "and was able to be selfish without hurting anyone." A typical Lydia Davis narrator has a mind "always so busy, always going around in circles, always having an idea and then an idea about an idea." This obsessive interiority does resemble Thomas Bernhard's, but whereas Bernhard's male characters demonically inflict their mental spillage on others and on the reader, Davis's female characters seem to want to apologize for their spillage, to clear it up, to reduce the stain. But how would one think less? When Davis's narrators think (aloud) about thinking less, they just add to the problem, enlarging the mental volume, not reducing it. Davis is witty with this paradox. The narrator of "What I Feel" says that she is trying to tell herself that "what I feel is not very important. I've read this in several books now: what I feel is important but not the center of everything. Maybe I do see this, but I do not believe it deeply enough to act on it. I would like to believe it more deeply."

But how could one not really be the center of everything? As Jane Austen knew, announcing a desire to be less important is full of its own self-importance. The woman who narrates "New Year's Resolution" informs us that she has been studying Zen Buddhism again, and that her New Year's resolution "is to learn to see myself as nothing." A friend tells her that his resolution is to lose weight. Comically, she wonders, "Is this competitive? He wants to lose some weight, I want to learn to see myself as nothing." As with so much of Davis's writing, the comedy unexpectedly quickens, like the sudden anger of a flame, and its intensity increases: how does a person learn to see herself as nothing, Davis asks, "when she had already had so much trouble learning to see herself as something in the first place?" She finds it fairly easy to be "nothing" in the mornings, but "by late afternoon what is in me that is something starts throwing its weight around. This happens many days. By evening, I'm full of something and it's often something nasty and pushy."

One does not need to know anything about the writer named Lydia Davis to feel a confessional pressure in this book. It is possibly a hindrance to know that she was born in 1947 and is currently a professor of writing at SUNY Albany; that she was married to the writer Paul Auster, had a son with him, was then divorced from him, and married the painter Alan Cote (to whom she is still married, and with whom she also has a son). The reader will never know at what moments the former husband who appears in these pages is closer to or farther from Davis's own former husband, if indeed that person appears at all here. Her work raises no interesting question about the relation of fiction to fact. Instead, it raises the more interesting question of how much a fictional story about a fictional self can shed, and still remain a story about a vivid self. The answer is almost everything, for two reasons: first, because a fictional self needs only to be a voice, or a mouth, to have a presence on the page; and, second, because when a fictional self is stripped down in this way an authorial self fills some of the vacated space. Necessarily, the stories assemble an intellectual and emotional autobiography; a sensibility is strongly confessed. "We know we are very special," Davis writes in "Special": "Yet we keep trying to find out in what way: not this way, not that way, then what way?" This restless business of "trying to find out" is precisely what constitutes the specialty, in both senses, of this writer.

The autobiographical atmosphere thickens in the last two hundred pages of the book. You could be utterly ignorant of Lydia Davis's personal circumstances and still be pretty sure, on the evidence of the stories, that her parents died in the past ten years or so. Several of the later texts have the ashen pallor of elegy. "Grammar Questions" poses as a piece of philosophical pedantry: if a man is dying in a particular place, the narrator asks, can one still say, "This is where he lives?" And "If someone asks me, 'Where does he live?' should I answer, 'Well, right now he is not living, he is dying?' " The narrator reveals that she is referring to her father; once again, pain and a certain insouciance of tone rub against one another. To say that someone is dying, Davis writes, suggests activity. "But he is not actively dying. The only thing he is still doing actively is breathing. He looks as if he is breathing on purpose, because he is working hard at it, and frowning slightly. He is working at it, but surely he has no choice. . . . I've seen this expression on his face often in my life, though never before combined with these half-open eyes and this open mouth."



Near the end of the collection, there is a peculiarly simple and lovely text of just three pages, entitled "How Shall I Mourn Them?" It consists of a list of repetitive questions, which begins:

> Shall I keep a tidy house, like L.?
> Shall I develop an unsanitary habit, like K.?
> Shall I sway from side to side a little as I walk, like C.?
> Shall I write letters to the editor, like R.?

Because of the long, deep journey we have made with the writer, now over hundreds of pages, but especially because of the tender material in several late stories, we infer that the title refers to mourning departed parents. The questions seem to refer to the habits of friends and acquaintances who, like the writer, have also been in mourning, and whose peculiarities are produced by their grief. But, as the list of questions continues, you notice that, amid the oddities, the habits described become more ordinary: "Shall I often look up words in my dictionary, like R.?" Or, "Shall I get a little arthritis in my hands, like C.?" Or, "Shall I always read with a pencil in my hand, like R.?" What is being described, one gradually surmises, is not freakishness but just life itself. So the answer to this beautiful text's question is: "I shall mourn them just by surviving them."

A tiny entry a few pages later, one of the last in the book, and entitled "Head, Heart," throbs with pain. "Heart weeps," Davis writes, and "Head tries to help heart," by reminding it about loss: "You will lose the ones you love. They will all go." Heart feels better, but not for long:

> Heart is so new to this.
> I want them back, says heart.
> Head is all heart has.
> Help, head. Help heart. ♦

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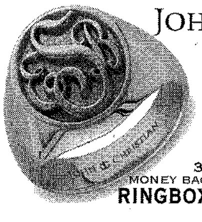

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## THE THEATRE

# SWASH AND BUCKLE

*A heroic "Hamlet" and musings on mortality.*

BY JOHN LAHR

At the finale of the last "Hamlet" to be seen in New York (the 2008 Public Theatre production in Central Park), Fortinbras called for a hero's cannonade to honor the slain Prince of Denmark—"Go, bid the soldiers shoot"—only to have his lieutenant whip out a pistol and shoot Horatio. Horatio, you'll recall, is the person whom Hamlet, with his dying breath, commands "to tell my story"; the jaw-droppingly ludicrous misinterpretation played almost like an unconscious wish to annihilate the brooding hero altogether—and, by extension, the whole damn Shakespearean canon. After this low-water mark, even mere competence would look like brilliance. Now, with Michael Grandage's barn-burning "Hamlet," imported from London's Donmar Warehouse (at the Broadhurst, in a twelve-week engagement), New Yorkers can replace the memory of the recent fiasco with a truer, more exciting measure of Shakespeare's unrivalled storytelling.

The slick, streamlined three-hour production stars Jude Law, who, at thirty-six, is genuinely "the glass of fashion and the mold of form." There have been better postwar British Hamlets—such as David Warner and Jonathan Pryce—who put their fingerprints on the role for a generation. Law's performance does not reach their level of inspired nuance, but it is admirable nonetheless, a sensation, if not a revelation. Whippet-thin and alert, Law is swift of foot and of speech. He has a sharp critical intelligence. He dexterously parses and shades Shakespeare's poetry, making the words as clear, crisp, and compelling as his profile. For his soliloquies, Law comes downstage and, with his piercing almond eyes, draws us into his turbulent consciousness. It's big magic.

But, no matter how expert his technique or how potent his charisma, Law can't hide his metabolism. He is easy in himself. He is affable. He is dashing. It's impossible to conceive of him as "pigeon-liver'd" or lacking in "gall." He has a solidity that Hamlet does not. Called back from the University of Wittenberg for his father's funeral and the coronation of his uncle Claudius (the excellent Kevin R. McNally), Hamlet is suddenly pulled out of a world of pure thought and dropped into a world of pure corruption. Compelled to act, he is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Paralysis, however, is not part of Law's DNA. His Hamlet is essentially heroic: for him, there is no issue between being and seeming. "To be, or not to be" is never the question; he just *is.* Law's Hamlet is too self-contained to get lost in his strategic role-playing. He never goes over the edge—or even up to it. All protestations to the contrary, he is on top of everything, a posture that mutes the play's dark humor.

Saxo Grammaticus, in his history of the Danes, gives the probable etymology of the name Hamlet as "fool" or "weakling." Hamlet may be, as the jejune Ophelia calls him, "the expectancy and rose of the fair state"; in action, however, he proves a more shadowy figure and something of a clown. Hamlet unwittingly drives his girlfriend to madness and suicide; he murders the wrong man; he sets his kingdom right by accident. Despite his certainty of Claudius's villainy, at the frameup of a fencing contest with Laertes in the final act, even after his mother sips from the poisoned chalice meant for him and collapses, Hamlet doesn't know where to look. "Let the door be lock'd. Treachery! Seek it out!" he shouts. The fatally wounded Laertes literally has to point Hamlet in the right direction. "Thy mother's poison'd./I can no more—the King, the King's to blame," he says. Only then, in the final beats of the play, does Hamlet, at the cost of his own life, take the revenge he's been willing himself to wreak since Act I.

Among Michael Grandage's many

*Henry Pettigrew (as Marcellus), Law, and Ryan. Photograph by Max Vadukul.*

gifts as a director of Shakespeare—an educated scenic eye, a knack for casting and for pacing—the greatest is his clarity. Of his recent popular productions—a thrilling "Othello" (with Chiwetel Ejiofor), a side-splitting "Twelfth Night" (with Derek Jacobi)—"Hamlet" has created the most media heat but seems to me the least sure-footed. Shakespeare's play opens in darkness on the chilly parapets of Elsinore, with sentries shouting words that brilliantly foreshadow the play's existential dilemma: "Who's there?" "Stand and unfold yourself." "Hamlet" is an exercise in unfolding: the playwright, the hero, and the audience work from the outside in, on a gradual journey toward a public and private truth. In this production, however, personality trumps complexity, and self trumps state. In the crepuscular gloom of Elsinore's monumental granite walls (handsomely designed by Christopher Oram), instead of the sentries and the embattled sense of danger, we get a dumb show of Hamlet's morbid melancholy: the prostrated prince slowly pulls himself to his feet.

To establish a mature, heroic Hamlet—one who serves the parameters of Law's virile persona—Grandage steers us away from the character's psychological conundrums. To satisfy salacious Elizabethan appetites, for instance, Shakespeare sauced up Hamlet's intense feelings for his mother with a hint of incest. Here, in the famous bedroom scene where Hamlet confronts Gertrude (Geraldine James) and dispatches Polonius (the superb Ron Cook), Grandage literally and figuratively draws a curtain over the issue, which otherwise might take some of the shine off Law's natural intrepidness. The moment is staged from Polonius's point of view: we are eavesdropping with him, behind a billowing white curtain, and for a good portion of the scene we can neither make out nor feel what's going on between mother and son.

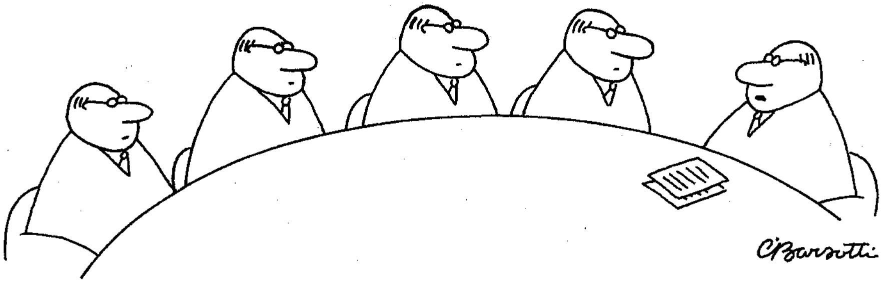
Grandage works the same sleight of hand with the other characters. For all the alarums about the Ghost—"It harrows me with fear and wonder," Horatio (Matt Ryan) says—when Hamlet père appears to his son, he is minus both his royal armor and his shoes. As played by the sonorous Peter Eyre, the Ghost is a swank spectre with a voice like an oboe; he's a ghost who can hardly say boo. In Eyre's case, the reversal of expectation is compelling; in the case of the bewildered Ophelia (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), whose madness is reduced to a kind of demure despair and whose demented song is barely audible across the footlights, it is not. Grandage just can't resist trying to tease up the familiar with the unexpected. Hamlet's crisis of conscience—the literary boilerplate of "To be, or not to be"—is performed against the background of a snowstorm. Far from expanding the meaning of the moment, the arbitrariness of the image distracts from it.

"Our dead author has had to endure all manner of revision," Grandage writes in the published version of his "Hamlet." "I feel confident his genius remains intact." It does, sort of. Grandage's swashbuckling attack on the play is meant for the mass audience, not for the reading room. If his interpretation lacks depth, the clear, strong melodramatic line of the plot—the withholding of action to maximize tension was Shakespeare's narrative innovation—still keeps the audience on an emotional roller coaster. The result, to appropriate Hamlet's words, is not so much "caviar to the general" as it is taramosalata—cheaper and easier to digest, maybe, but still tasty.

In the brilliant tracery of her one-woman shows, Anna Deavere Smith, like Hamlet, uses "indirections, to find direction out." She listens, she watches, she records, then she acts out both the verbatim testimony and the telltale evasions of each subject's syntax. Out of this vaudeville of observations—her judgment lies in the juxtaposition—she creates a vivid collaged world. Unlike her award-winning earlier shows about the 1992 Los Angeles race riots and the 1991 Crown Heights clashes, her newest work, "Let Me Down Easy" (well directed by Leonard Foglia, at the Second Stage), is an inquiry not into a big public event but into a big spiritual one: how we die. Here her narrative challenge is greater; her dramatic trajectory is broader and harder to map. Nonetheless, the ninety-minute journey that we take with her into this netherworld has a terrific cumulative impact.

In her obsessive curiosity, Smith casts a wide net. She looks at everything from wounded machismo (a maimed bull rider, a boxer battered into a four-day coma) to the people who tend those wounds. Sometimes her subjects, such as the late TV critic Joel Siegel, are at death's door; sometimes, like Trudy Howell, the director of an orphanage in South Africa, they gently open the door to death. I could have used a lot less of the playwright Eve Ensler's claptrap about Tina Turner ("You can watch her career where she literally lands in her vagina") and a lot more of Ann Richards, the late governor of Texas, who was dying of esophageal cancer. "I can feel good or I can feel bad," she explains. "And a lot of what I feel is in my brain. . . . So when I get up in the morning, I say to myself, 'This is going to be a good day.' " Richards, who was the second female governor of her state, makes a show of good cheer by reminding Smith about the first female governor, Ma Ferguson: "She was the one when asked about bilingual education who said, 'If the English language was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for everybody!' "

"Let Me Down Easy" has a poignant extra drama, which sinks in only after the play is over. In her previous work, Smith brought us news of other people. "Let Me Down Easy" sticks to the same format but allows the now middle-aged playwright to seep in under the surface of her story. Smith is doing more than opening up a much needed discussion about the dying and those who minister to them. The purpose of the enterprise, we realize, is for the playwright herself to learn how to die. It's bracing, poetic stuff. As Hamlet says, "Readiness is all." ♦



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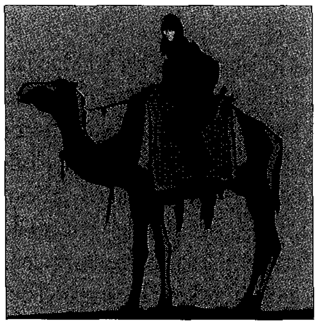

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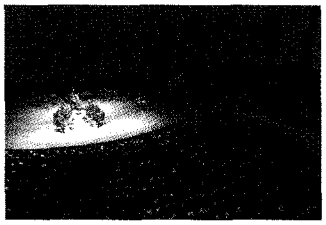

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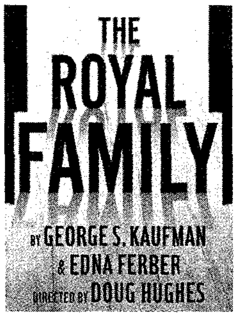

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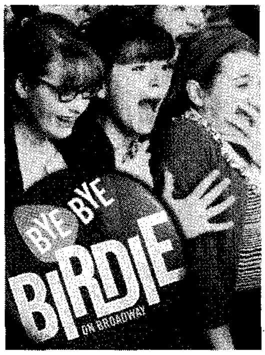

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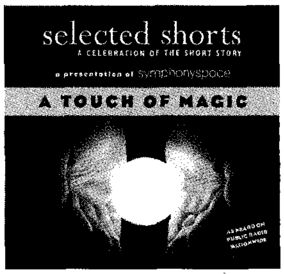
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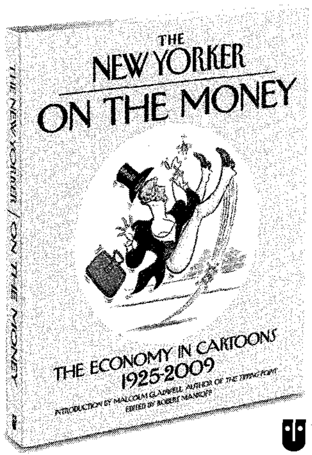
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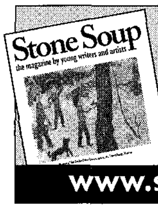

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### MUSICAL EVENTS

# WAKING UP

*Alan Gilbert takes over at the New York Philharmonic.*

### BY ALEX ROSS

For two drowsy decades, the New York Philharmonic played it safe: a pair of grand-old-man music directors (Kurt Masur, Lorin Maazel), redundant festivals of canonical composers (Brahms, Tchaikovsky), the usual parade of soloists (when in doubt, Yo-Yo Ma). Attendance figures were generally good and finances mostly stable, yet the Philharmonic made few waves. Even last year, when a visit to North Korea generated headlines, the itinerary drew more notice than the music-making. It takes some effort to remember that this orchestra used to be a fairly wild group. In the nineteen-fifties, Dimitri Mitropoulos confronted audiences with twelve-tone music and had them dancing in the aisles, albeit toward the exits. His successor, Leonard Bernstein, passionately promoted American composers, dabbled in avant-garde happenings, and tried to convince schoolkids that Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique" gave a better high than LSD. Pierre Boulez, for his Rug Concerts series of the seventies, had the seats removed from Philharmonic Hall and seduced shaggy-haired crowds with far-out sounds of Varèse and Ligeti. As recently as the nineteen-eighties, Zubin Mehta held festivals titled Horizons, exploring diverse modern fare. In other words, the Philharmonic once put its virtuosity in the service of ideas.

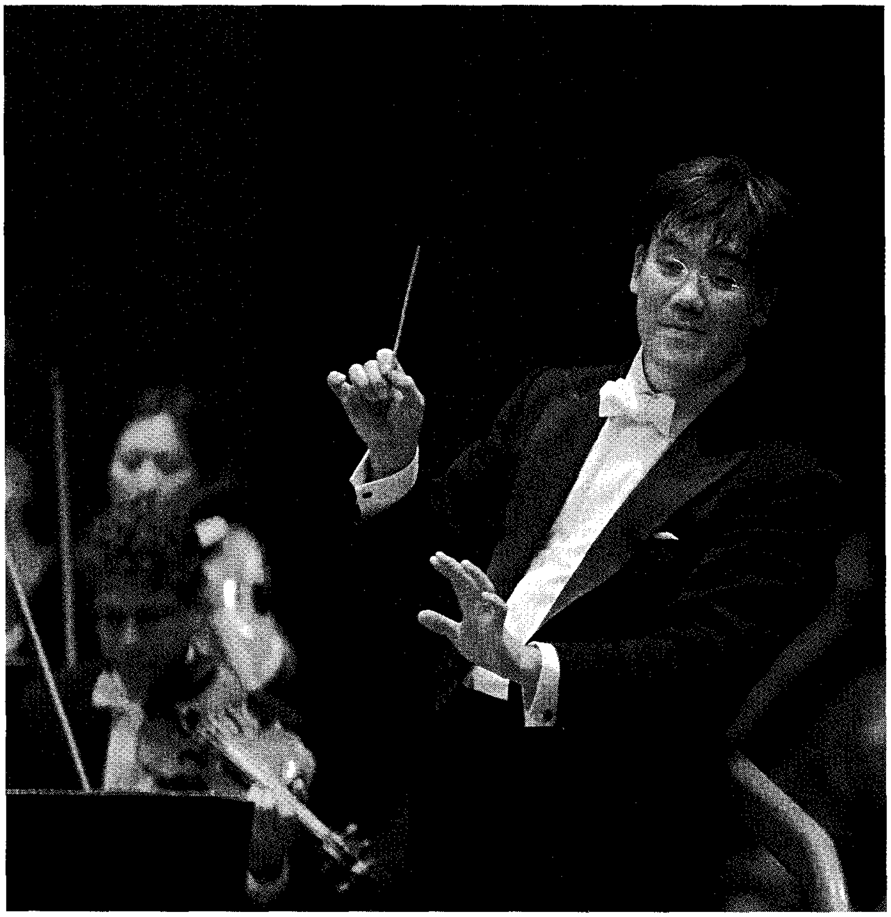
Two years ago, for the first time in recent memory, the Philharmonic took a gamble: it announced as its next music director the American conductor Alan Gilbert, then forty years old. "Alan who?" was a not uncommon response. Gilbert had been known to the orchestra since childhood, his parents having played together in the violin section. (His mother, the Japanese-born violinist Yoko Takebe, is still part of the ensemble; his father, Michael Gilbert, a scion of Tennessee fiddle players, is now retired.) To the public, though, Gilbert was a mostly unknown quantity, despite numerous guest-conducting appearances. He built his career quietly, often in Europe; from 2000 to last year, he led the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, and he also directed the Santa Fe Opera. Meanwhile, the New York Philharmonic unsuccessfully pursued various other conductors, including Riccardo Muti, who fit the mold of the senior celebrity maestro to which the orchestra had become accustomed. When, ten months after Gilbert's appointment, Muti agreed to take over the Chicago Symphony, Philharmonic players were said to be envious—a bad sign for the incoming director.

Gilbert officially assumed his post at a gala concert, on September 16th. Backbench grumblings aside, the risk seems smartly taken. First, Gilbert is a native New Yorker who intends to remain in the city most of the year. He will not be one of those directors who work their magic for twelve contractually obligated weeks and then vanish into their villas. Last summer, Gilbert set an excellent precedent by choosing to lead all of the Philharmonic's free outdoor concerts instead of delegating the job to an assistant or a guest. Facing a crowd of eighty thousand people in Central Park, he made casual comments before the encore, cutting an amiable profile. At Avery Fisher Hall, too, he has occasionally picked up a microphone and, in the old Bernstein style, delivered mini-lectures, although he has wisely omitted the rambling political disquisitions.

Gilbert has also shown more interest in modern music than any Philharmonic director since Boulez. His gala dispensed with the usual musical bonbons, instead presenting a world première—"EXPO," a gleaming overture by the orchestra's new composer-in-residence, Magnus Lindberg—and a rare performance of Olivier Messiaen's fervid 1936 song cycle "Poèmes Pour Mi," with an intensely engaged Renée Fleming. (A new-music series, under Lindberg's aegis, will be inaugurated in December; future activity will benefit from a ten-million-dollar grant from the financier Henry Kravis.) After intermission came the "Symphonie Fantastique," completing a theme for the night: music of three centuries, in brilliant color, stemming from outside the Germanic tradition. Masur and Maazel had little flair for programming; overtures, concertos, symphonies, and new pieces were haphazardly lumped together. Gilbert, like David Robertson, in St. Louis, and Michael Tilson Thomas, in San Francisco, devises programs that tell a story.

For those who have followed Gilbert's career, neither his anti-aristocratic stance nor his lively intellect comes as a surprise. The real news is the sound of the Philharmonic itself. Simply put, the orchestra is playing better than it has in the seventeen years that I've been a critic in New York. It has mellowed, evened out, grown warmer, and—strange to say, given the new director's relative youth—matured. It sings where it used to shout. Gilbert has plainly thought hard about how the ensemble should relate to its home space, the eternally problematic Avery Fisher Hall, and he has split the violins on either side of the podium, as Mahler and Toscanini did in their Philharmonic days. The result is a more balanced, centered sound, with the hall's harsh acoustics tempered and the bass strengthened. Climaxes—the March to the Scaffold in the "Fantastique," the roaring final pages of Mahler's Third Symphony, the anguished fanfares of Schoenberg's "Pelleas und Melisande"—now achieve the rounded weight that you associate with the great European ensembles. Close your eyes and you think you're hearing the Berlin Philharmonic. Then a tangy clarinet solo kicks in—Mark Nuccio, the acting principal clarinet, is proving a worthy successor to the great Stanley Drucker, who retired last summer, after sixty years—and you know you're back in N.Y.C.

Gilbert is not the sort of conductor who slathers his personality over the music. Listeners who grew weary of Maazel's interventionist habits—his arbitrary twisting of tempos, his abrupt underlining of instrumental details—may be relieved that Gilbert's interpretations contain few radical flourishes. (I became discouraged less than an hour into the previous regime, when Maazel, at his opening gala, imposed a cartoonish ritardando at the end of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth.) Here, finally, is a conductor who makes sensible, subtle choices. Gilbert is precise in setting tempos and giving cues—inexact entries are exceedingly rare—yet his precision is not of the mechanical, whip-crack kind. Maazel conducted from the top down, his arms fluttering like the wings of a bird of prey. Gilbert leads more from the middle of the body, with a big, wide beat. Solos ring out with new freedom; Liang Wang, the principal oboist, made an especially poetic impression in the slow movements of the "Fantastique" and of the Brahms Violin Concerto (a rich-hued interpretation, with Frank Peter Zimmermann). As Anthony Tommasini noted in the *Times*, the Philharmonic seems, for the first time in many years, relaxed.



*Under Gilbert, the Philharmonic has a warmer sound. Photograph by Chris Lee.*

The missing element is heat. Gilbert has been a shade too cautious, as if he were a well-brought-up kid who suddenly finds himself at the wheel of a hundred-thousand-dollar sports car. The Berlioz was beautifully played, with tricky accelerations executed to a tee, but it lacked demonic energy. The first movement lasted eighteen minutes—five minutes longer than it did in Charles Munch's and Bernstein's classic recordings. You wanted Gilbert to press forward, even if it meant losing some precision in the process. The Mahler, too, needed more delirium in the anarchic development section of the first movement, where Bernstein, in his readings, seemed to send all of Charles Ives's marching bands into the coffeehouses of Vienna. But it's understandable that Gilbert has so far avoided pushing his new vehicle to the limits. He's building relationships with the musicians, and the initial results have been strong enough that no one should be pining for Muti any longer.

At the end of "Pelleas," Schoenberg's gargantuan orchestral meditation on the same Maurice Maeterlinck play that inspired Debussy's opera, there was a remarkable effect that I hope is a sign of things to come. In the final measures, the brasses reprise, in muted but rasping tones, the dissonant fate motif that has sounded through the piece. The passage achieved the kind of narrative force that seldom occurs in modern orchestral playing: it was cold, curt, jagged, communicating the bitter dread at the heart of Maeterlinck's tale of doomed love. The orchestra sounded, at long last, fully awake. ♦

## THE CURRENT CINEMA

# NAUGHTY BOYS

*"Where the Wild Things Are" and "An Education."*

### BY DAVID DENBY

The opening sequences of Spike Jonze's "Where the Wild Things Are"—a live-action feature based on Maurice Sendak's 1963 children's classic—are sensationally good. Max (Max Records) is an angry nine-year-old boy: his teen-age sister has abandoned him for her friends, and his divorced mother (Catherine Keener) noodles on the couch with her boyfriend. The way Max Records plays him—with darting eyes, and lips pressed together in rage—the boy has no idea that anyone's feelings but his own could be real. He builds forts in his bedroom and an igloo in the front yard. He wants to be enclosed in his own imaginative space, but he also needs to burst out and tear around, and, as Max crashes through the house, Jonze's camera, bounding up and down stairs, stays with him and brings us as close to a boy's impetuousness and egotism as we're likely to get in the movies. The sequence has non-stop momentum and a juggernaut impact. Max's mother tries to calm him down, but he bites her on the arm and runs out of the house, wearing a wolf suit, its pointed ears sticking up like two little knives. As he gets into a boat and heads for the open sea, the movie slows down and offers a different kind of wonderment: the dark skies and foamy white waves of a perilous journey.

Max arrives at a mysterious island, and Jonze, re-creating the monsters that live there, stays close to Sendak's ineffably goofy style. The creatures are eight or even nine feet tall—snouted, horned, clawed, and furry, with huge heads and snaggleteeth that are as pointed as Max's wolf ears. One is lionish, another goatish—each suggests a different animal, yet stays within a child's fantasy of that animal. An eccentric menagerie, they are physically a little manic, but they're also almost tragic in their uncertainty and their melancholy. They briefly think of eating Max, but, claiming magic powers, he shouts, "Be still!," and they crown him king instead. "Let the wild rumpus start!" he cries, and they all run and jump, bash one another, gouge holes in trees, and fall down in a heap, with Max happily nestled among them.

*The wild things have mysterious relations with one another—friendships, love affairs.*

Jonze, the director of the witty experimental features "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation," was right to use actors in elaborate suits (designed by Jim Henson's company), instead of animated figures, to play the monsters. The creatures sail through the air now and then, but most of their movements are weighted, rather than slickly virtuosic or glib. Only their faces, which have human-seeming eyes and mouths, were digitally enhanced. Though Jonze stays faithful to the creatures, he discards Sendak's sombre green-and-brown backgrounds. The movie was shot in Australia, and the landscapes are fresh and bright; blossoms fall like a benediction through the trees, and a big hairy dog rambles on a ridge above a blank yellow-sand desert. The best scenes are peerless in their creative freedom and warmth: when Max sits atop the head of the monster's nominal leader, Carol (James Gandolfini), holding on to the beast's horns, and is told that the kingdom is his, it's an ecstatic image of childhood aggression fulfilled. Max has lost his old family but gained a new one, and it pays him unlimited attention.

Then "Wild Things" runs into trouble. Sendak's book was created for young children. The text is all of three hundred and thirty-eight words long; some of the drawn pages are rhapsodically wordless. But the movie has been designed for older children and adults, and the creatures, voiced by strong actors like Gandolfini, Forest Whitaker, Lauren Ambrose, Chris Cooper, Paul Dano, and Catherine O'Hara, never stop talking. As re-created by Jonze and Dave Eggers, who collaborated on the screenplay, they turn out to be a discontented and quarrelsome bunch. They have mysterious relations with one another—friendships, love affairs—and deep-seated grievances. They throw jealous fits or walk off in a huff, and we don't know where the hurt feelings are coming from. The bickering peters out, then starts up again, and, after a while, the creatures all sound like peevish adults elbowing one another out of the way at the smoked-fish counter at Zabar's. No one gets enough love or respect. In the book, the creatures are projections of Max's imagination, but these beasts are all too real, and, appearances to the contrary, they aren't wild things. They're becalmed, even defeated. They build a twiggy fort that looks like a giant birds' nest, and then don't use it much. After their initial burst of energy, they fall into a funk, and the movie seems to be less about liberation than about futility. One of the things they ask Max when he becomes king is: "Will you keep out all the sadness?" The answer, it turns out, is no.

Jonze and Eggers have spoken of their desire to keep the film close to a child's needs, but have they done that? Kids like danger, followed by a release from danger and a return to safety, yet the only danger posed by these creatures is that they will turn Max into someone as messed-up as they are. The filmmakers may have wanted to link Max's anger to the creatures' wounds, but the connection is fuzzy—Max isn't the one who hurt them. I have a vision of eight-year-olds leaving the movie in bewilderment. Why are the creatures so unhappy? That question doesn't return a child to safety or anywhere else. Of one thing I am sure: children will be relieved when Max gets away from this anxious crew.

It's been apparent for some time that Peter Sarsgaard is an actor of major talent waiting for a major role, and he almost gets one in "An Education." He plays David Goldman, a London hustler of enormous charm who zips around town in a maroon Bristol sports car, and seduces, slowly and patiently, a very bright sixteen-year-old girl named Jenny (Carey Mulligan). A student from suburban Twickenham, Jenny feels hemmed in by her cautious parents and her school, and is rather too easily dazzled by champagne, supper clubs, and a weekend in Paris. David ducks in and out of art auctions and houses for sale, talking people into selling him things for less than they're worth, then reselling them at a profit. He's furtive and improvisatory, a genteel swindler. He never quite tells the truth, but Sarsgaard plays him as a sensitive man who has genuine warmth and a gift that even an honest man may lack: he's always plausible. No matter how far-fetched his inventions, you want to believe in him; his attentions are so personal and so shrewd that they're reassuring. Based on a short memoir by the talented, acid-tongued journalist Lynn Barber (which was first published in *Granta*), the movie is set in 1961, when England was emerging from postwar austerities and the fabled antics of "swinging London" were just getting under way. Jenny ignores her exams, passing up the chance to go to Oxford, yet the luxury that David and his society-crook friend Danny (Dominic Cooper) introduce her to answers all the romantic dreams she has of life's possibilities. It's not sex that holds her and David together but a heightened eagerness for pleasure of any kind, and Jenny is caught. Smart as she is, she somehow doesn't ask herself why such an attractive and seemingly accomplished man would bother with a sixteen-year-old. The movie is told from her point of view, and only gradually does she begin to understand that there's something vaguely gangsterish about her lover's activities.

Barber's memoir was adapted by the novelist Nick Hornby, and much of the dialogue is sharply etched. (Emma Thompson has a couple of crackling scenes as a formidable, stupid, anti-Semitic schoolmistress.) The director, Lone Scherfig, was born in Denmark but is alive to nuances of class and money in England. She gives the movie a relaxed, even tempo, with an underlying uneasiness. Jenny is in real trouble, and Carey Mulligan, who worked with Sarsgaard in the recent Broadway production of "The Seagull," makes her fallible but brave; her Jenny can make foolish remarks without seeming foolish as a person. "An Education" is perceptive and entertaining, but it doesn't have the jolting vitality of, say, "Notes on a Scandal," which dramatized an even more unconventional liaison—older woman, fifteen-year-old boy. I have a feeling that Sarsgaard could have stretched the role a lot further if the script had allowed him to, but, still, what he does is surprising. David may be a pathological liar, but he's not quite contemptible. As Jenny wakens to each new impression of art, food, and travel, David does, too. This seducer is the opposite of jaded. Sarsgaard makes it seem as if David, out of need, desire, and strength—and weakness, too—were experiencing everything for the first time. ♦

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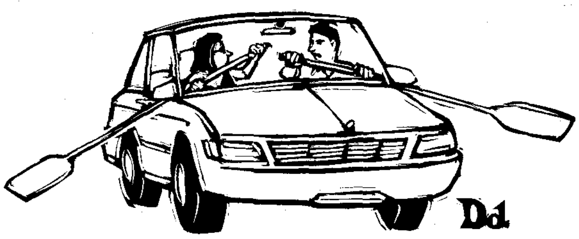
PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

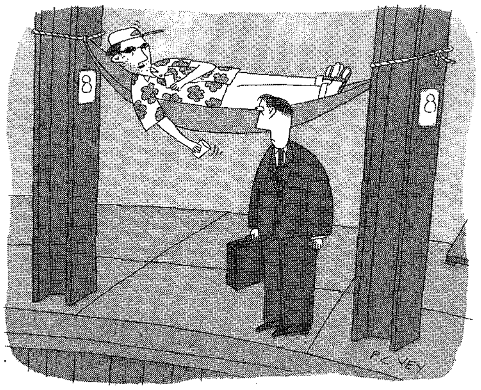
# CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, October 18th. The finalists in the October 5th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 2nd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.*

## THE WINNING CAPTION



*"American car companies just can't make a decent hybrid."*
Eric Prestemon, Sunnyvale, Calif.



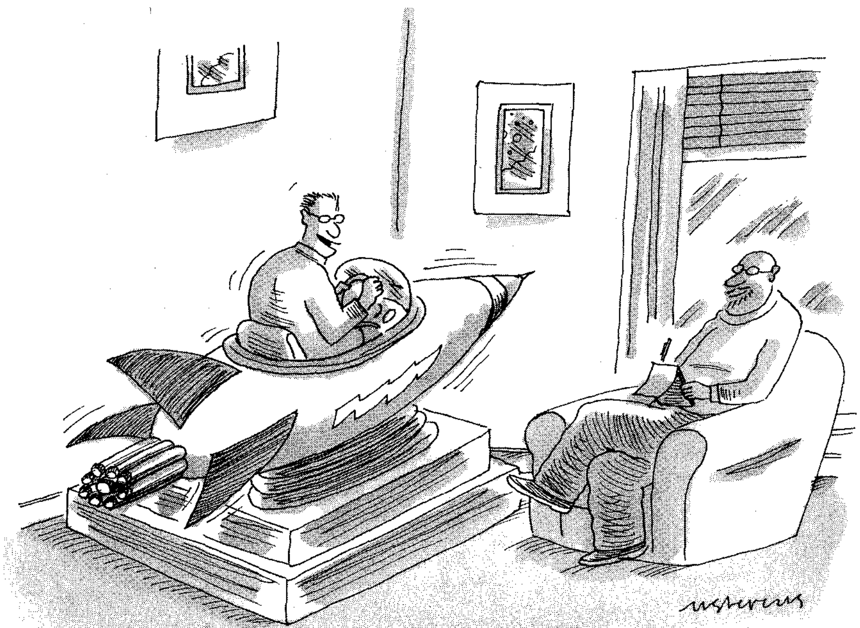
## THE FINALISTS

*"Brother, can you spare a lime?"*
Alex Williams, Los Altos, Calif.

*"Help the yardless?"*
Bill Wharton, Needham, Mass.

*"Margaritaville or bust."*
Shannon Yentzer, Portland, Ore.

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

All-New Ford Taurus SHO

**What does a tie have in common with the most innovative full-size sedan in America?***

**Both were created by a desire for change.**

The all-new Ford Taurus is one of the many products of change from Ford – with innovations like available radar technology that alerts you when sensors detect vehicles in front of you, behind you and in your blind spots.

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POWERED BY FORD

Enter for a chance to win the All-New Ford Taurus. The most innovative full-size sedan in America.* Visit marthastewart.com/warriorsinpink.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Contest begins 9/15/09 and ends at 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on 12/15/09. To enter, go to www.marthastewart.com/warriorsinpink and complete the official online entry form as directed. Contest open to legal residents of the 48 contiguous United States and the District of Columbia, aged 18 years or older at the time of entry. Void where prohibited. See official rules at www.marthastewart.com/warriorsinpink. One (1) Grand Prize of a 2010 Ford Taurus will be awarded, valued at up to $41,995 (taxes, destination, handling and dealer fees paid). The Sponsor of this Contest is Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc., 11 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036. *Based on total number of first-in-class features. Class is full-size non-luxury sedans.

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